



Outcome Evaluation of the Family Affairs Parenting Programme

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DECLARATION

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Signed by candidate

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ABSTRACT

This study is an outcome evaluation of the Family Affairs programme, a parenting programme offered by Life Choices, a non-profit organisation based in Cape Town, South Africa. Life Choices focuses on parenting skills development through workshops, psychosocial counselling, and job-search counselling services for parents and caregivers. The main aim of the Family Affairs parenting programme is to improve the capacity of parents and caregivers to provide children with competent, quality parenting despite adverse circumstances.

Family Affairs offers a four-part multi-component intervention that includes a compulsory parenting skills workshops and non-compulsory one-on-one psychological support, one-on-one job-search counselling, and establishing or participating in support groups. The evaluation of the outcomes of the Family Affairs parenting programme was aimed at responding to three research questions. The first was whether the programme facilitates parental development, which comprises significant improvements in parents' belief systems, family organisational patterns, communication, and parents' problem-solving skills. The second was whether the programme improves parents' relationships with their children. The third was whether parents' parenting styles improve as a result of participating in the programme. The three constructs of interest in the study were thus parental development, parent-child relationship, and parenting style.

A quantitative approach and outcome evaluation design were followed in analysing secondary pre-test-post-test data gathered simultaneously by the Family Affairs programme. For the present study, a total of 306 programme participants in the period 2018 to 2020 were sampled, from which the self-reported data were gathered. Wilcoxon's signed rank test and the Kruskal-Wallis tests were used for the before-and-after comparison and the comparison across cohorts, respectively.

A comparison of the scores for self-reported parental self-development, specifically family organisational patterns and problem-solving skills, before and after attending the programme showed significant improvements. There were also self-reported improvements in how parent communicated with their children and their parenting styles. The results of the evaluation show that the Family Affairs programme does produce significantly positive short-term self-perceived improvements in parental self-development, parent-child relationships, and

parenting style.

KEYWORDS: Family Affairs programme; outcome evaluation; quantitative; parental development; family organisation; problem-solving; parent-child relationship; communication; parenting style

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CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to and overview of the study, which focused on the Family Affairs parenting programme as implemented in communities in Cape Town's Cape Flats, South Africa. The chapter highlights the critical role of effective parenting in children's developmental outcomes, particularly within the diverse socio-economic context of South Africa. It then describes the Family Affairs programme, detailing the programme specifications, the profile of targeted communities and participants, and the structure and content of the programme. The next section delves into the problem statement, outlining the challenges faced by South African parents, especially those in poor areas like the Cape Flats. This is followed by the rationale for the study, together with the study's objectives and evaluation questions. The chapter then provides a brief overview of the methodology followed in conducting the study, together with the research ethics that were upheld. The chapter concludes with an outline of the structure of the dissertation.

1.2 Background

Life Choices, a non-profit organisation based in Cape Town, South Africa, offers the Family Affairs parenting programme, which was the focus of this outcome evaluation. South Africa's Children's Act 38 of 2005 defines a parent as an individual who has complete parental responsibilities and rights to the child. In the present study, of the term *parent* includes biological parents, guardians, and caregivers who play the role of a parent in the child's life (Bernedo et al., 2024; Lachman et al., 2016).

The concept of family in South Africa is shaped by the diverse cultural, social, and economic context of the country, and includes single-parent households, blended families, foster care, extended families, polygamous families, and child-headed households (Ekanem, 2012; Ramugondo & Kronenberg, 2019; Republic of South Africa, 2021). Parenting plays a pivotal role in shaping the well-being of children and influences their development across various domains (Frosch et al., 2019). In the South African context, where diverse socio-economic and cultural factors intersect, effective parenting is critical (Mijlof et al., 2020; Rich & Roman, 2019).

The quality of family life has a significant influence on children's well-being. Izzo et al. (2022) emphasise that family functioning, the quality of parent–child relationships, and family satisfaction are crucial predictors of children's happiness. These sentiments are supported by Butler et al. (2022), who highlight the important role of supportive family relationships in fostering positive adjustment in children, especially adolescents. Research on parenting has also shown that family plays a vital role in promoting positive mental health outcomes for children (Behere et al., 2017; Fakhrou et al., 2023). Positive parent–child interactions support the development of children’s self-esteem, their emotional awareness and expression, their sense of belonging, their social and decision-making skills, and their sense of security (Backhaus et al., 2023; Dykes & Carelse, 2022; Jeong et al., 2021; Kakhki et al., 2022; Lindsey & Mendez, 2022; Lippold et al., 2016; Murray & Cooper, 2021). Positive parental behaviour often reflects in improvement of children’s scholastic performance (Joussemet et al., 2008) and a reduction in engagement in risky and adverse behaviours (Sandler et al., 2015), which often lead to criminality (Mercy et al., 2002).

South Africa’s National Development Plan 2030, published in 2012, is the blueprint for the country’s development, which includes the aims of reducing poverty and inequality. The National Development Plan 2030 (Government of South Africa, 2012) recognises the importance of positive parenting in achieving these goals. Positive parenting is foundational to building the capacity of children to learn and succeed in foundational and higher education, which increases their chances of finding or creating employment and earning a higher income, which supports achievement of the National Development Plan 2030’s (Government of South Africa, 2012) goal of reducing poverty. Various programmes and organisations support achievement of the goals of the National Development Plan 2030 (Government of South Africa, 2012), one of which is Life Choices.

1.3 Life Choices organisation profile

Life Choices is a non-profit youth development organisation based in Cape Town, South Africa. The organisation focuses on providing interventions across five key areas to help young people thrive: family stability, health and well-being, leadership- and life skills, education and skills development, and employment and work-readiness (Life Choices, 2022). Life Choices primarily targets communities in the Cape Flats area of Cape Town, an area known for high

levels of gun violence, crime, drug dealing, and gangsterism. The programme aims to support parents and caregivers in this challenging environment through parenting skills that enable them to provide better care for their children (Life Choices, 2022). Life Choices has impacted the lives of more than 200 000 people from the Cape Flats since 2005. The organisation continues to work towards creating a world where every young person feels safe and valued and is free to thrive. One of the offerings of Life Choices, the Family Affairs programme, which was the focus of the present study, is discussed in the next section.

1.4 The Family Affairs programme

The South African government, through the Department of Social Development, endorsed the Family Affairs parenting programme, including its workshops, as part of its family-strengthening initiative Life Choices (Life Choices, 2022). The overall aim of the Family Affairs programme is to improve the capacity of caregivers to deliver competent, high-quality parenting to children despite adverse circumstances, and the programme has reached over 4,804 parents since its inception in 2007 (Life Choices, 2022).

The Family Affairs programme is a parenting skills development programme that provides parenting workshops and psychosocial counselling services for parents and caregivers. The organisation's job-search counselling services connect participants to resources to assist them in securing employment and identifying educational opportunities. In addressing parenting capacity needs, Family Affairs contributes to strengthening parenting skills and building resilience in parents (Life Choices, 2022).

1.4.1 Target communities and participants

The Family Affairs programme's yearly recruitment target is 500 participants in groups of 20 to 25 parents and caregivers (Life Choices, 2020). Participants are recruited in various ways. Some are referred by others who had participated previously, some through local organisations that know about the programme, and others are recruited through networks of people in local communities. The training occurs in local community halls for ease of access by the parents and caregivers.

At the inception of the Family Affairs programme, parents of children who had participated in

one of the iterations of the intervention offered by Life Choices, called Leaders' Quest, were exclusively targeted. However, it was challenging to enrol some of the parents, and Life Choices decided to extend the recruitment to parents in the greater community of the Cape Flats, which consists of mostly informal settlements and townships inhabited by predominantly poor black African and Coloured people. The Cape Flats is known for high levels of gun violence, crime, drug dealing, and gangsterism (Van der Westhuizen & Gawulayo, 2021).

1.4.2 *Structure and content of Family Affairs programme*

The Family Affairs intervention is a four-part multi-component intervention. The programme is structured in such a way that it is ongoing throughout the year.

Part 1 comprises a parenting skills workshop on practical and interactive parenting skills. The workshop is presented in six weekly sessions, which are mandatory, each with a duration of three-and-a-half hours (Life Choices, 2019, 2020). A seventh, non-mandatory session is a 'gift' session where parents organise an activity to give back to their community. Overall, the workshop is aimed at developing parental skills and building parental resilience.

The topics of Part 1's seven sessions are: parents' self-development, building confidence, reconciling with the past, communication and problem-solving, youth risk behaviours, family violence and its impact, and family organisational patterns. Additional areas addressed during these seven sessions include children's needs, temperaments, stages of development, and self-esteem (Life Choices, 2022). Parents are taught techniques to communicate with their children, listen to their children, and identify risky behaviours, and are educated about children's rights. Parents are encouraged to attend a minimum of four sessions. Family Affairs uses a combination group-process approach, mixing asset-based principles, cognitive behavioural techniques, social learning, psychoeducation, self-reflection, and meaning-making conversations (Life Choices, 2019).

Parts 2, 3, and 4 of the programme are voluntary, and include one-on-one psychological support, job-search counselling, and establishing and/or participating in support groups.

Part 2 comprises one-on-one psychological support from a Family Affairs therapist (Life Choices, 2019, Life Choices, 2022), and parents are encouraged to use this service, although it

is not mandatory. Each parent is offered up to three one-on-one sessions. Relatives of participants may also make use of this service, if needed (Life Choices, 2022).

Part 3 comprises efforts to establish parental support groups, whereby parents volunteer to establish community support groups for parents, which groups will continue well beyond the seven weeks. Parents or caregivers who want to continue meeting after the initial seven weeks can participate in a support group, with support from Family Affairs every two weeks for up to three months, and once every second month for the following four months (Life Choices, 2022). As with the psychosocial counselling, parents are strongly encouraged to utilise this service. They may either establish a support group with the support of Family Affairs or join an existing group. These ongoing groups operate under the direction and control of the parents themselves; parents set their own agendas, and Family Affairs facilitators provide support (Life Choices, 2022). These support groups engage in sessions where parents participate in group activities and discussions, and they share personal stories and the difficulties they face (Life Choices, 2022).

Part 4 entails one-on-one job-search counselling, aimed at bridging the gap between parents' and caregivers' needs and available resources (Life Choices, 2019). Parents are mentored through up to three sessions by a coach in seeking employment (Life Choices, 2022). Parents are assisted in writing a curriculum vitae and improving their interview skills and are then directed to employment agencies or given suggestions regarding study opportunities (Life Choices, 2022). Parents who wish to start a business are also provided with assistance through referrals to other service providers. Table 1 provides an overview of the four parts of the programme.

Table 1: Family Affairs Parts 1 to 4

Part	Details
1 Parental skills training	1.1 Workshop (six sessions) on parental skills: a. Belief systems (2 sessions) b. Family organisational patterns (2 sessions) c. Communication and problem solving (2 sessions) 1.2 Parents run a ‘gift’ session ¹
2 Support groups	2.1 Assisting parents to set up parental support groups
3 Psychosocial counselling	3.1 One-on-one psychosocial support sessions with a registered counsellor to parents
4 Job-search counselling	4.1 Facilitating CV-writing, interview skills, job-searching

The present study focused on Part 1, specifically the six mandatory sessions of the workshop, but the discussions are underpinned by activities in Parts 2, 3, and 4. The next section clarifies the research problem, followed by the rationale for the study.

1.5 Problem statement

President Nelson Mandela, at the launch of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund in Pretoria, in May 1995, said, “There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children” (Mandela, 1995). Parenting in South Africa faces various challenges, such as poor parenting, parental neglect, violence against women and children, poor parental mental health, and parental unemployment (Adebiyi et al., 2022; Daily Maverick, 2023). Poverty, in particular, poses a considerably risk to parenting, as poverty often leads to neglect and abandonment of children (Cluver et al., 2016). Cowling (2023) notes that, in 2023, people living in extreme poverty in South Africa numbered close to 18.2 million, and highlights ongoing challenges of poverty and inequality, including the struggle to achieve the recommended daily food intake (Laframboise, 2023; Raniga & Mthembu, 2016).

The harsh socio-economic challenges faced by many South African parents, compounded by the enduring effects of intergenerational poverty, intergenerational trauma, and intimate-partner violence often leave parents feeling overwhelmed and disempowered (Adebiyi et al.,

2022; Gould et al., 2022; Matlakala et al., 2022). Studies by McLoyd et al. (1994) and McLoyd (1990) found that parents dealing with poverty are more vulnerable to depression, which, in turn, is associated with the increased likelihood of parents using harsh discipline (Conger et al., 1994) and engaging in emotionally distant and inconsistent parenting practices (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002).

Research in Nigeria and Kenya found that about 25% of children in Nigeria and 45% of children in Kenya live in single-parent households, and that these households are mostly headed by the mother (Mbithi, 2019; Owoeye & Owoeye, 2021). These studies highlight the many challenges that single parents or caregivers and children face, including financial problems and the associated effect on the development of the children. Concerningly, in comparison to both countries, the prevalence of single-parent households in South African is higher. Gould and Ward (2015) and Duncan and Pienaar (2019) report that over 50% of children in South Africa are raised in households where one parent is not involved in parenting the children. A recent Social Research Foundation article by Gumede (BusinessLive, 2023) reported that two-fifths of South African children grow up in a single-parent home.

The lack of support from the other parent often places a significant emotional, financial, and physical burden on the primary caregiver, affecting the individual's ability to provide optimal care and support for the children (Liu et al., 2020). These stressors faced by South African parents, particularly those who live in poverty, have far-reaching consequences for both parents and children. The lack of financial resources not only hinders parents' ability to meet their children's essential needs such as nutrition, healthcare, and education, but also intensifies the overall difficulty of parenting (Richter et al., 2009).

Children raised in families with incomes below the poverty line often face significantly poorer outcomes across developmental areas, including physical and mental health (Daly et al., 2015; Tomlinson et al., 2022), educational achievement, and success in the labour market (Cluver & Gardner, 2010). Furthermore, these children are at a higher risk of experiencing child maltreatment, adverse childhood experiences, and increased material hardship. They are also more likely to engage in risky behaviours, delinquency, and criminal activities during adolescence and adulthood (Ward & Kotze, 2016).

Meinck et al. (2016) conducted an evaluation of a parenting support programme, the Sinovuyo Teen Programme, which programme is aimed at preventing abuse of adolescents in South Africa. Meinck et al. (2016) found that the programme led to significant reductions in violent and abusive discipline practices amongst caregivers, and that caregivers became more engaged in their children's lives. The study highlights the value of effective parental training programmes in decreasing violence and abuse, particularly in the South African context.

A pre-test–post-test study by Doubt et al. (2018), titled "Delivering a parenting programme in rural South Africa", evaluated the effectiveness of a parenting support programme aimed at preventing abuse amongst adolescents in the Eastern Cape province. Some of the findings of the study were a reduction in child abuse and child delinquency, and improvements in parental supervision and positive parenting. Another recent study, conducted by Mahlangu et al. (2021), titled "Prevalence and factors associated with experience of corporal punishment in public schools in South Africa", found that 44.8% of learners self-reported having experienced corporal punishment at home from parents and caregivers in the previous six months (Mahlangu et al., 2021). Research has shown a profound and lasting effect of childhood exposure to violence on mental health and overall well-being, which manifests in the way these children later parent their own children (Richter et al., 2018).

The use of harsh discipline at home sometimes drives children to spend time outside the home, which may increase the likelihood of their exposure to violence, especially sexual and physical violence, with interpersonal violence costing South Africa approximately R50.9 billion in 2019, with R15.7 billion attributed to healthcare costs and R35.2 billion to criminal justice sector costs (Matzopoulos & Neethling, 2023).

Poor supervision due to parental neglect, compounded by substance abuse, increases the risk of children being exposed to violence (Dykes & Carelse, 2022), especially in South Africa, where violence against children is high (Richter et al., 2018).

According to a recent report from Statistics South Africa (2024), titled "Child series Volume II: Crime against children", the incidence of rape cases involving children rose by 6.3 percentage points from 2015/2016 to 2019/2020. Crime against children poses a grave concern, as it significantly affects their mental, physical, and emotional well-being (Fang et al., 2017). While many of the children who are raped in South Africa are raped by strangers, a significant

number of rape crimes happen in their home environment (Govender, 2023).

Studies by Devries et al. (2010) and Pereira et al. (2015) found that children in households where mothers experience intimate-partner violence and where the children witness parental conflict, including aggressive and coercive behaviour, often form negative relationships with their parents, and are often the victims of parental violence. These adverse conditions could be mitigated if parents are supported and educated through effective, evidence-based parenting programmes, and there is a call for comprehensive interventions to support such families (Tsonga et al. 2024).

Addressing this plethora of challenges requires effective, evidence-based programmes aimed at supporting parents and caregivers, ultimately mitigating the effects of poor parenting on both parents and their children (Rotheram-Borus et al., 2011; Tomlinson et al., 2005). The South African Children's Amendment Act 41 of 2007 mandates interventions to support and develop positive parenting. It further emphasises the need for inter-departmental collaboration and strong partnerships between civil society and government to support parents. To ensure that programmes are effective and continuously improved, it is vital that the outcomes of such programmes be evaluated and continually improved to address the plight of these children (Jeong et al., 2021). Parenting training interventions have been noted to bear promising outcomes, such as improved parent–child relationships, positive problem-solving, confident parenting, and decreased child maltreatment (Jeong et al., 2021). The literature reviewed in this section indicates the importance of parental development programmes and assessment of their effectiveness, to inform ongoing improvements.

Research studies examining parenting underscore the importance of addressing parenting skills and support as part of broader efforts to promote parent–child relationships in South Africa (Lachman et al., 2016, 2017; Langa & Pretorius, 2020). While there is a growing body of evidence-based evaluative research supporting the value of effective parenting programmes in strengthening parent–child outcomes in high-income countries, there is a gap in research about the effectiveness of such programmes in low- and middle-income countries (Pang, 2020).

1.6 Rationale for the study

Parenting programmes are one of the effective mechanisms to engage and provide support for parents and caregivers in order to prevent and mitigate the effects of poor parenting, neglect, and socio-economic challenges, and to enhance parents' relationships with their children (Backhaus et al, 2023; Fang et al., 2017; Zheng et al., 2019). Parenting training programmes are implemented with good intentions, but a critical gap exists in understanding their true impact on participating parents, specifically within the South African context. Hendricks and Wright (2018) note that, although there are many organisations conducting parenting programmes in South African communities, most have not been evaluated.

Evaluating the extent to which a parenting programme significantly improve belief systems, family organisational patterns, communication, and problem-solving abilities of parents is important in South Africa because evidence-based parenting programmes have been identified as a key strategy for promoting positive parenting and preventing violence against children (Ward et al., 2020). The opportunity to evaluate the Family Affairs Programme offered by Life Choices presented an avenue to make a contribution towards closing the gap in literature on the effectiveness of parenting programmes in South Africa, which is a developing-country context. The present researcher was of the view that an outcome evaluation of the programme would provide evidence regarding the strengths of the programme, and also reveal opportunities to effect enhancements.

Assessing the extent to which the parenting programme improves parents' relationships with their children and the extent to which parents' parenting styles improved was also considered important, as healthy parent–child relationships are critical to children's cognitive, neurobiological, and socioemotional development (Frosch et al., 2019). As with most parenting programmes, the Family Affairs parenting programme offered by Life Choices (2022) assumes that, as parents improve their parental knowledge and skills, it positively impacts the parent–child relationship. Therefore, evaluating the effectiveness of parenting programmes in South Africa is crucial to improving parenting practices, parent–child relationships, decreasing child maltreatment, and preventing violence against children.

Considering the context of South Africa, and specifically the socioeconomic realities of the Cape Flats, the importance of positive parenting programmes cannot be overstated (Ward et

al., 2015), where the challenges faced by parents directly impact children's health and behaviour (Gould & Ward, 2015). Thus, the rationale for the present study was to conduct an evaluation of the Family Affairs parenting programme offered by Life Choices, in order to address the gap in literature on such programmes in a developing-country context and provide evidence-based recommendations for enhancements to the programme.

1.7 Objectives of the evaluation

The primary objective of this outcome evaluation was to assess the extent to which the Family Affairs parenting programme offered by Life Choices enables parents to deliver competent, quality parenting despite adverse circumstances, which is the ultimate goal of the programme. Three constructs were focused on in this outcome evaluation, namely 1) *parental self-development*, specifically positive changes in parents' belief systems, family organisational patterns, communication, and parents' problem-solving skills; 2) *parent-child relationship*; and 3) *parenting style* resulting from programme participation.

Achieving the overall objective of the evaluation was guided by three research sub-objectives (RSOs):

RSO1: To assess the extent to which the Family Affairs parenting programme enhances parents' belief systems, family organisational patterns, communication, and problem-solving skills;

RSO2: To examine the programme's positive impact on parent-child relationships; and

RSO3: To explore how programme participation contributes to the enhancement of perceived parental knowledge and style of parenting.

The evaluation was aimed at contributing valuable insights that not only enrich the academic understanding of parenting in South Africa, but could also inform the development of effective parenting interventions. The next section provides definitions of the concepts of interest in the present study.

1.8 Definitions of concepts of interest in the study

1.8.1 *Parent*

The concept ‘parent’ in the South African context is complex, and definitions reflect the complexities of parenting in a diverse socio-cultural context where parent–child relationships are shaped, not just by biology, but by meaningful social interactions, cultural practices, and support systems (Adebiyi et al., 2022). In South African research, a parent is typically defined as an individual who has a biological or legal responsibility for a child, which individuals thus include biological and adoptive parents (Cluver & Gardner, 2007; Strode & HIV/AIDS Vaccines Ethics Group, 2020). These individuals have a direct and formal relationship with the child, and their role entails both legal responsibilities and aspects of emotional care (Gould et al., 2022). South Africa’s Department of Health (2013), in the R378 Regulations Relating to Research with Human Subjects, notes that the legal definition of a ‘parent’ is the biological or adoptive mother or father of a child, who is also usually also the child’s legal guardian (Slack et al., 2013).

In the context of South African parenting evaluation research, the definition of ‘parent’, and thus ‘parenting’, is not limited to the traditional biological or legally adoptive parent. South Africa’s social and cultural realities are reflected in diverse family structures. Family members and even biologically unrelated individuals often play a major role in parenting children, which is why they are included in studies on parent–child relationships (Hall & Mokomane, 2018). While the biological relationship between parents and children is acknowledged, in the present study, the term *parent* includes any persons who play a major role in parenting a child, regardless of whether the person is biologically related to the child, and discussions around parents and parenting thus also apply to caregivers, who are described in the subsequent section.

1.8.2 *Caregiver*

South Africa’s Children’s Act 38 of 2005 (Government Gazette, 2006) defines a caregiver is any person other than the child’s parent or guardian who cares for the child, for example, a foster parent, a family member, or a care worker. The definition even includes a child above the age of 16 years who is the head of the household.

In South Africa, many families' structures are complex and fragmented, due to many factors, including the death of one parent, the parents not living together and only one parent raising the children, or, as in many cases, the children are parented by neither parent. In the latter case, foster parents often assume the role of primary caregivers, or elder children assume the responsibility of parenting younger siblings. Sometimes, even when both parents are present, neither may be involved in the parenting of the children (Aliber, 2003).

Caregivers play an influential role in children's emotional and social development, particularly in contexts where the biological parents are not present, which may be due to various circumstances, such as parental illness, their poverty, or their remote work location (Sherr et al., 2017). In the South African context, caregiving often includes a reliance on extended family such as grandparents and community systems of support, such as foster parents, neighbours, and networks of care for children (Cluver et al., 2014; Makiwane & Khalema, 2016).

As noted above, in the present study, a caregiver is defined as an individual who provides care for a child, which thus includes parents, but also extends to other family members and non-relatives who play a significant role in a child's care and upbringing (see Gould & Ward, 2015; Jansen & Swartz, 2019). Caregivers also include children who are the head of the family, due to being orphaned or because the parents are ill (Cluver & Orkin, 2009). In these cases, elder children assume the main responsibility for the home and caring for younger siblings (Simbayi & Cloete, 2014).

1.8.3 Parenting

As the word implies, 'parenting' is the role of a parent caring for a child. Parenting in the context of South Africa, is often considered a communal responsibility, which view is based on traditional African values, which differs from the more individualistic approaches common in some Western settings (Adebiyi et al., 2022; Rich & Roman, 2019). To shed more light, this communal approach to parenting is also due to the need created by the adverse socioeconomic contexts of some communities (Adebiyi et al., 2022; Mahomed et al., 2022). It is important to note that, in the South African context, parenting is characterised by diverse and complex realities of families, which reflect the country's unique historical and sociocultural landscape (Cluver et al., 2014; Gould & Ward, 2016; Kritzas & Grobler, 2007; Makiwane & Khalema, 2016).

In South African research, and in the present study, ‘parenting’ refers to the behaviours and practices of parents and caregivers in facilitating and supporting the growth and development of the children for whom they care (Gould et al., 2022). This includes both the practical aspects of caregiving and the broader psychosocial roles that parents play in supporting and raising their children (Pienaar & Kriel., 2018). Safer Spaces (2024), an online knowledge hub on community safety and violence prevention in South Africa, defines positive parenting as an atmosphere where there is warmth and consistent parenting, and where parents have good relationships with their children. Such parenting includes use non-violent forms of discipline and age-appropriate supervision (Wessels & Ward, 2015).

1.8.4 *Family*

The Child Gauge (2018) notes that the South African White Paper on Families defines a family as a societal group linked by blood (kinship), adoption, foster care, marriage (civil, customary, or religious), civil union, or cohabitation, extending beyond a specific physical residence. The Child Gauge (2018) states that this definition embraces diverse family relationships by acknowledging the broad range of connections amongst family members, recognising that families often do not reside together in a single household. South Africa’s National Development Plan (Government of South Africa, 2012) views family (ies broadly, expressly including single-headed families, various cohabitation arrangements, multigenerational families, and families with heterosexual and same-sex parents.

1.8.5 *Parenting programme*

A parenting programme is a structured initiative designed to facilitate a parent or caregiver learning and practising skills, behaviours, and attitudes that enhance the parent–child relationship (Backhaus et al., 2023). Parenting programmes often include short- and longer-term interventions (Gould & Ward, 2015). In the South African context, such programmes are often initiated by non-profit organisation, and include group-based training programmes, home visits, and community-level interventions. Gould and Ward (2015) highlight the importance of evaluating such programmes and sharing knowledge on programmes that have been proven effective in improving parenting practices and child outcomes.

The next section provides a brief overview of the methodology followed in conducting the

study, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

1.9 Overview of study methodology

The present study followed a quantitative research approach, which entails gathering numerical data for statistical analysis (Creswell & Pablo-Clark, 2011). The research design was an outcome evaluation using secondary data gathered by the Family Affairs parenting programme during retrospective pre-test–post-test surveys, which were conducted simultaneously (Life Choices, 2022). The target population was parents and caregivers residing in the Cape Flats in Cape Town who had participated in the programme in 2018, 2019, or 2020. A total of 306 respondents who had completed the surveys were sampled, and the data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27). The analyses conducted included reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, and inferential statistics.

The next section provides an overview of the layout of the dissertation.

1.10 Ethical considerations

1.10.1 Informed Consent

All participants were fully informed about the evaluation process, including the purpose, methods, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as participants. This included obtaining explicit consent from participants before collecting any data. This will be explained further in the methodology chapter.

1.10.2 Ethical Review

The permission to conduct the evaluation, the use of the secondary data and collection of primary data was requested and granted by the programme managers at Family Affairs, while evaluation approval by the University of Cape Town’s Ethics Committee was sought and given in October 2021.

1.10.3 Confidentiality and Privacy

The confidentiality and privacy of the data collected was duly protected since names of participants were not required, ensuring that participants' anonymity was secured. Data received was kept secure and anonymous in data files and stored in the Life Choices' cloud storage facility. This ensured that data files would be properly stored and would not be inappropriately accessed.

1.10.4 Respect for Autonomy

The autonomy of participants was ensured as their right to participate or not participate was guaranteed and that participants were not coerced into participating and that they had the right to withdraw from the evaluation at any time, after it began.

1.10.5 Fairness and Justice

The evaluation procedure was explained in the languages of the participants to ensure that the evaluation is conducted fairly and without bias. This included ensuring that all participants are treated equally and that if any participants choose not to participate in the evaluation, this would not in any way cause any potential harm and bias against them.

1.1.6 Cultural Sensitivity

The cultural sensitivity was ensured by administering the questionnaires using facilitators who were the same as those who facilitated the sessions for the participants so as to ensure that they were free to ask any question if they were unsure about the terms used.

1.11 Layout of the dissertation

This dissertation is organised into five chapters. Chapter 1 provided background on the study and its context, followed by a detailed discussion of the parenting programme under study. This was followed by the study's problem statement, the rationale for conducting the study, and the study's objectives. The subsequent section provided definitions of key terms used in the study, followed by a brief overview of the methodology followed in conducting the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of extant relevant literature in the domain under study, establishing the theoretical framework for the study. Chapter 3 details the research methodology, including the research approach, research design, population, sampling, data collection, and analysis, followed by the ethical considerations that were deemed pertinent to the study. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analyses, and Chapter 5 summarises the key findings and conclusions, together with implications for practice, followed by recommendations for future research.

1.12 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the study by providing background and context to the study and the aim of the outcome evaluation of the Family Affairs parenting programme. The chapter detailed parenting programmes in the South African context and provided a brief overview of the structure of the programme under study. The chapter also presented the problem statement and the rationale for conducting the study, together with definitions of key terms as used in the study. This was followed by a brief overview of the study methodology and the layout of the dissertation. The overall aim of the study was to provide valuable insights into the field of parenting interventions in a developing-country context, South Africa, to improve our understanding of their impact in a unique sociocultural and socioeconomic context.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the dynamics of parenting and the parent–child relationship within the context of Cape Flats communities in South Africa, which are marked by poverty and violence. The first section outlines the theoretical framework that underpins the Family Affairs programme, which is grounded in Walsh's (2002) theory of family resilience, which emphasises three domains: family belief systems, organisational patterns, and communication. This framework is used to outline how the Family Affairs parenting programme aims to improve positive parenting in order to enhance parenting outcomes, supported by evidence from various studies showing the effectiveness of similar interventions in South Africa.

The literature review also explores the effectiveness of comparable, recognised group-based parenting interventions implemented in other parts of the world, indicating similarities and differences between the Family Affairs parenting programme and these parenting interventions. This review focuses specifically on outcomes that align with those outlined in the Family Affairs Parenting programme's theoretical framework. By critically reviewing findings of research on established programmes, the review aims to provide an informed assessment of the potential success of the Family Affairs Parenting programme in achieving its intended outcomes.

The bond formed between parent and child is considered foundational to a child's development in early childhood (Cluver et al., 2016; Jama Shai & Sikweyiya, 2015; Stormshak et al., 2002). When the relationship between the parent and the child is healthy, it is generally attributed to effective parenting skills (Stormshak et al., 2002). When the parent is uninvolved, or the child has negative experience with a parent, the associated outcomes amount to an adverse childhood, which could manifest in various ways later in life (Cluver et al., 2016; Jama Shai & Sikweyiya, 2015). Researchers have concluded that a strong and healthy parent–child bond is crucial, as it determines the manner of other relational patterns the child establishes outside the home setting (Cluver et al., 2016; Knerr et al., 2013; Stormshak et al., 2002).

Family Affairs, the parenting programme under evaluation, operates in Cape Flats communities. Children in these communities are known to be at a significantly high risk of

unhealthy development because of poor parenting, poverty, alcoholism, drug abuse, violence, crime, and gangsterism, which are prevalent in these areas (Du Toit, 2014; Dziewanski, 2020; Fulu & Kerr-Wilson, 2015; Van der Westhuizen & Gawulayo, 2021). Exposure of children to such highly risky behaviours increases their vulnerability to a myriad of social, health-related, and economic challenges, coupled with heightening developmental instability (Sandstrom & Huerta, 2013).

Shields et al. (2008) found that early parental involvement is key to mitigating children's exposure to community violence. A 2016 national study of child maltreatment in South Africa indicated that at least 40% of young people have experienced either one or a combination of the following: sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect (Burton et al., 2016). This national study highlighted the critical role that effective parenting plays in the life of a healthy child, especially in the South African context. Educating and skilling parents and caregivers are therefore at the centre of reversing the effects of neglect and exposure to the grave social ills to which many South African children are exposed (Burton et al., 2015; Cluver et al., 2019; Shenderovich et al., 2020).

There is a consensus that it is more difficult to be a parent now than it was in the past, with many parents feeling unsure as to how to raise their children (Ajayi et al., 2023; Prelow et al., 2010; Roman & Benjamin, 2022; South African Child Gauge, 2022). Parental mental distress may manifest as stress, intimate-partner violence, and lack of support for the other parent and children, and can negatively impact parenting practices and children's behaviour, both in the short- and long term (Black et al., 2001; Gould et al., 2020). In recognition of this challenge and the value of the parent-child relationship, improving parenting is often purported in the literature to be a primary solution to preventing the social ills that otherwise render children life-long victims of maladjustment (Chen & Chan, 2016; Cluver et al., 2018; Furlong et al., 2021; Human Sciences Research Council, 2021; Shenderovich et al., 2019).

In the South African context, which characterised by violence, especially against women and children, investigating the role of parenting skills training in improving parenting and the parent-child relationship is essential (Lachman et al., 2016; Pedersen et al., 2019; Ward et al., 2020). There is a need to continue to expand the evidence of effective parenting training and support programmes in the South African context. Evaluations can assist in upscaling and

introducing more effective interventions (Ward et al., 2015). The next section discusses the Family Affairs programme theory.

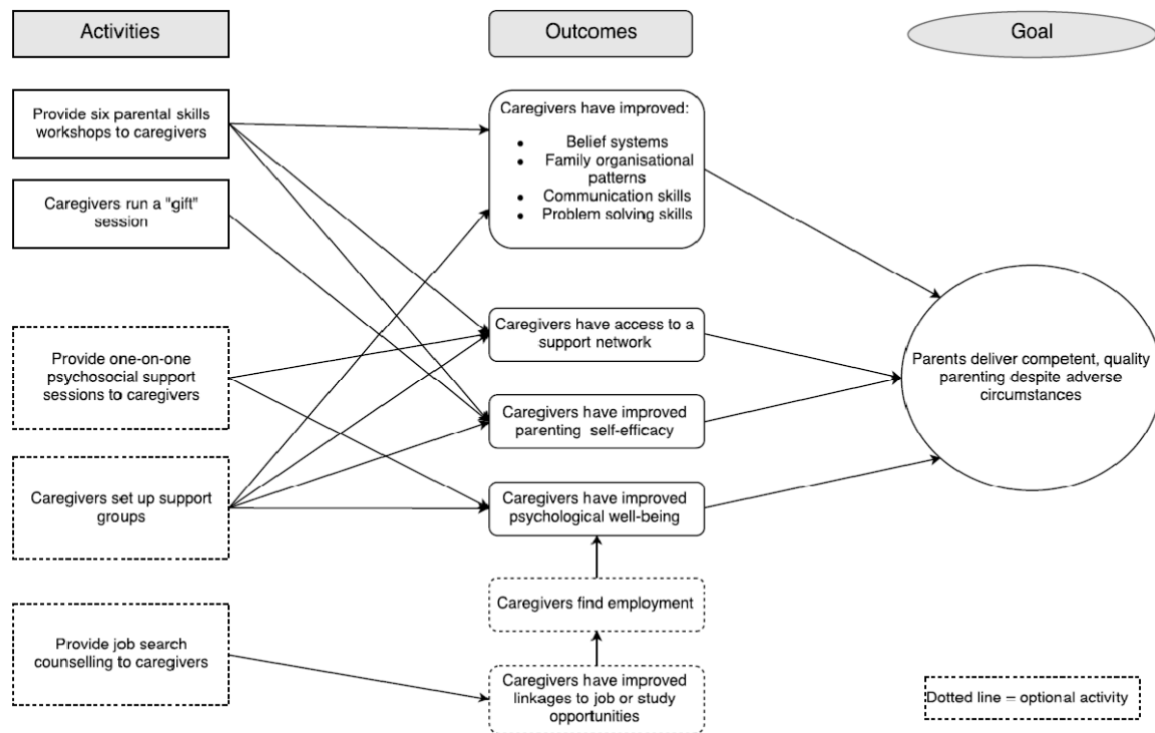
2.2 Family Affairs programme theory

Every intervention is built on assumptions about how it will address a specific problem and achieve its intended outcomes, which assumptions are called ‘programme theory’. A robust programme theory is one that is based on valid assumptions about the nature of the targeted problem and feasible solutions (Pawson & Tilley, 1997), and is vital in designing, implementing, and evaluating social interventions (Funnell & Rogers, 2011). An inaccurate or inappropriate programme theory could lead to ineffective interventions that fail to achieve their intended goals (Donaldson, 2007). In the case of programmes such as the Family Affairs parenting programme, it is vital that the programme theory consider the complexities of family dynamics and the socio-economic context, as this will inform context-specific strategies for improving parenting practices and child outcomes (Bornstein et al., 2022).

Evaluation of the plausibility of a parenting programme’s theory requires a critical examination of the underlying assumptions, the logic connecting activities to outcomes, and its alignment with existing research and best practices in the field (Rogers et al., 2000). The evaluation of an intervention’s plausibility allows for the testing of a programme's conceptualisation, revealing its strengths and weaknesses and, therefore, what needs to be enhanced to ensure its effectiveness (Chen, 2014). An intervention without a strong theoretical foundation is unlikely to make clear it approaches or demonstrate its impact (Astbury & Leeuw, 2010). A programme’s theory informs the structuring of the different components of a programme and how these links together to yield the desired outcomes (Rossi et al., 2004).

The structure and desired outcomes, together with the relationships between activities and outcomes, of the Family Affairs programme are depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Family Affairs programme (Source: Family Affairs, 2021)



The Family Affairs intervention is expected to produce outcomes at different levels. The activities depicted with solid borders indicate mandatory activities, while those with dotted lines indicate voluntary activities. The causal relationships between activities (left), outcomes (middle), and the ultimate goal (right) are indicated with arrows.

The causal assumptions that underpin the programme include following:

1. Providing parents with skills workshops focused on improving parent–child relationships within a group setting leads to improved family belief systems, organisational patterns, communication, problem-solving, support networks, and parenting self-efficacy.
2. Providing parents the opportunity to give back in service to other members of the community improves parenting self-efficacy.
3. Providing parents and other family members with one-on-one psychosocial support improves psychological well-being and strengthens the support network.
4. Providing parents with group-based social support focused on reflection and practising

parenting skills in solidarity with others leads to improved family belief systems, organisational patterns, communication, problem-solving, greater access to support networks, parenting self-efficacy, and psychological well-being.

5. Providing job-search counselling to parents enhances their ability to identify job opportunities, which, coupled with study opportunities, improves their career development, with a concomitant positive impact on the socio-economic well-being of the parent and the child.

The Family Affairs programme theory is based on Walsh's (2002) theory of resilience as applied in the family. Walsh's (2002) framework of family resilience focuses on three main domains: 1) the family belief system, which includes a positive self-development and outlook and spirituality; 2) family organisational patterns, which includes responsiveness, connectedness, and social and economic resources; and 3) effective communication, which includes clarity, open sharing of emotions, and collaborative problem-solving (Luthar et al., 2000; Walsh, 2002). Walsh (2002) posits that the family resilience framework is useful in practice because it considers the dynamism of family life and context. This is aligned with the view of Bornstein et al. (2022), who state that parenting programmes should be designed to promote the improvement of family belief systems, organisational patterns, communication, and problem-solving skills by shifting parents' beliefs about effective parenting practices.

While research has established that children's behaviours change as a function of effective parenting (Bermudez & Mancini, 2013; Masten, 2001; Siegel & Bryson, 2020; Ungar, 2016), few studies have attempted to operationalise Walsh's (2002) framework. The underlying assumption of the Family Affairs' programme theory, which is based on the work of Walsh (2002), is that the combination of the activities of the programme (see Figure 1) will enhance individuals' parenting skills, leading to enhanced behavioural outcomes, despite adverse life circumstances.

A literature review was conducted to explore the plausibility of the assumptions underpinning the Family Affairs parenting programme by looking at the desired outcomes of the programme, which are aimed at achieving the end goal of the programme, which is parents delivering competent, quality parenting despite adverse circumstances. The literature is discussed below.

2.2.1 *Improved parental beliefs systems*

Walsh's (2002) dimension of 'family beliefs systems' is incorporated into the broader outcome of 'self-development', which includes self-efficacy, adaptability, self-management, and self-care. According to documentation by Life Choices (2019) on the Family Affairs programme theory, Family Affairs Parenting programme adopted Walsh's (2002) approach. Bornstein et al. (2022) supports the notion that parenting programmes should be designed to promote the improvement of family belief systems regarding effective parenting practices (Bornstein et al., 2022).

The National Bureau of Economic Research (2023) published a paper called "Addressing the roots of educational inequities by shifting parental beliefs", stating that shifting parental beliefs is fundamental to addressing and transforming parenting behaviours. This view is supported by Tandfonline (2022). The World Health Organization (2023), in a systematic review of parenting guidelines, maintains that effective parenting interventions improve parental belief systems, resulting in more positive attitudes and behaviours in parenting. An evaluation study by Smit et al. (2018) of the Positive Parenting Programme in South Africa found that participating parents' beliefs regarding parents had shifted towards positive practices, evident in reported improved communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and family organisation.

Murray et al. (2015) and Lund et al. (2018) conducted evaluation studies on the World Health Organization's Parenting for Lifelong Health initiative, a group of evidence-based parenting programmes whose goal is to promote positive parenting and prevent violence in poor communities. Both studies were conducted in the South Africa's context, and both found that the programmes are effective at improving parental beliefs, with parents becoming more supportive of their children. Richter et al. (2016) and Reddy et al. (2020) evaluated different parenting programmes in South Africa, focusing on outcomes like those of the Family Affairs programme and Walsh's (2002) three key domains of family resilience. The findings of some studies, however, do not fully support the focus on parental belief systems. Love et al. (2002) reported mixed results with regard to improving specific parental outcomes such as belief systems and family organisation in the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project, implemented in different areas. While the programme was effective after its first year, long-term implementation was riddled with limitations due to its short-term focus, variability in

implementation, and potential biases (Love et al., 2002). Similarly, Sanders and Turner's (2018) review of the Positive Parenting Program concluded that, while the intervention had been effective in improving parenting and children's behaviour, some evaluations found limited improvements in parental belief systems and family organisation in different contexts, which was attributed to inconsistent implementation (Sanders & Turner, 2018).

A further consideration was raised by Jones and Prinz (2005), who posited that there is a reciprocal relationship between parental self-efficacy and parental beliefs. When parents believe they have an opportunity to positively influence their child's behaviour, they are more likely to engage in positive parenting practices, which, in turn, improves their parental self-efficacy (Jones & Prinz, 2005). This notion is supported by a systematic review of qualitative literature by Butler et al. (2020), which highlights the reciprocal relationship between parental self-efficacy and parental beliefs. When parents are equipped with the skills and emotional support they need, their confidence in their abilities tends to increase, which, in turn, may significantly influence their beliefs and, ultimately, their parenting style (Butler et al., 2020). This highlights the understanding that improving parental beliefs is crucial to improving parents' perceptions and beliefs about parenting.

The Family Affairs programme provides parents with parental skills development and emotional support, which is likely to increase parental self-efficacy, which, in turn, could positively influence parents' beliefs and parenting styles. In addition, Butler et al. (2020) confirms the value of providing parents with both skills and emotional support, noting that it enhances the chances of sustaining the positive outcomes in the long term.

While every programme has its own approach and method of implementation, the literature, overall, and particularly the research of Smit et al. (2018) in South Africa, supports the focus on shifting parental belief systems towards more positive parenting practices, aligned with Walsh's (2002) emphasis on family belief systems as a key domain of family resilience. This suggests that the aim of the Family Affairs programme to improve parental beliefs and attitudes has a strong theoretical foundation. It is therefore a plausible assumption that addressing parental belief systems with regard to parenting assist in achieving the overall goal of parents being able to deliver competent, quality parenting despite adverse circumstances.

2.2.2 *Improved family organisational patterns*

Family Affairs broadened Walsh's (2002) 'family organizational patterns' to include routines, e.g., drawing up a schedule for when family members perform certain tasks together or on their own (Life Choices, 2019), such as chores, preparing and eating meals, homework, fun family time, and quality one-on-one time. The programme aims to teach parents how to create a routine, set boundaries, and better manage family responsibilities.

There is support in literature for this component of the Family Affairs programme. Richter et al. (2016), who evaluated the Strengthening Families Program, and Reddy et al. (2020), who evaluated the Early Childhood Development Parenting Program, found that the programmes significantly enhanced the participating parents' family organisation pattern. Murray et al. (2015) and Lund et al. (2018), who conducted evaluation studies on the World Health Organization's Parenting for Lifelong Health initiative group of parenting programmes in South Africa, found that parents who had completed the programmes were better able to organise family routines.

Lachman et al. (2017) also revealed the effectiveness of parenting programmes in improving family organisational patterns, with effect sizes in statistical analyses indicating meaningful shifts in how parents managed family routines and responsibilities. By teaching parents how to create routines, set boundaries, and manage family responsibilities, the programme contributed to more stable and supportive family environments (Lachman et al., 2017). Better organisation lowers the stress levels of both parents and children, thereby reducing conflict (Lucia & Dumas, 2013). Thus, the literature is supportive of this aspect of the Family Affairs parenting programme.

2.2.3 *Improved communication and problem-solving skills*

The Family Affairs programme broadened Walsh's (2002) 'communication and problem solving' to include more authoritative communication, a concept that was popularised by emotional intelligence author Daniel Goleman (2002), coupled with open and warm expressions of emotion and clear expectations (Life Choices, 2019). According to Goleman (2002), authoritative communication emphasises confident decision-making, task and role modelling and clear, visionary guidance. The programme also addresses problem-solving.

While the two aspects are distinct, they are intertwined, as clearer and high-quality communication enhances the family's abilities to solve problems. Some of the studies discussed below also looked at these two aspects in tandem.

Wyman et al. (2000) underscore the importance of clear, high-quality family communication as a parenting skill. Richter et al. (2016) and Reddy et al. (2020), in their valuations of the Strengthening Families Program and the Early Childhood Development Parenting Program, respectively, found that the programmes significantly enhanced family communication and problem-solving patterns. Bornstein et al. (2022), Richter et al. (2016), and Reddy et al. (2020) also emphasise the importance of developing parents' communication- and problem-solving skills. The studies by Murray et al. (2015) and Lund et al. (2018), conducted in South Africa, found that the programmes they studied were effective at improving parental communication and problem-solving.

The systematic review of parenting programmes by Benzies et al. (2008) underscores the importance of communication skills in improving family functioning. Training parents in effective communication techniques and creating opportunities for practice, such as problem-solving exercises, nurture closer family relationships (Benzies et al., 2008; Lachman et al., 2017; Shenderovich et al., 2019). This notion is supported by the results of a randomised control trial experiment involving Parenting for Lifelong Health programmes for young children in South Africa, the results of which showed that the programme was effective in improving parental communication and emotional expression, which allowed the parents greater emotional connection with their children (Ward et al., 2019).

Cluver et al. (2018) reported similar findings in their investigation of the effects of a cluster of Parenting for Lifelong Health programmes using cluster randomised controlled trial, which found that the programme significantly improved parents' problem-solving skills. The investigation, at the point of a five-month follow-up during the programme, also showed a 28% reduction in physical discipline, as the parents were more likely to engage in communication and problem-solving methods. However, Cluver et al. (2018) noted that the programme's duration of 12 sessions may be too short to embed and sustain these changes.

Using a pre- and post-test evaluation design to evaluate a cluster of Parenting for Lifelong Health interventions, Bhana et al. (2004) explored the impact of a parent-adolescent

communication and found moderate to large improvements (0.63). In a similar study, conducted by Lachman et al. (2016), the Sinovuyo Teen Parenting Programme was evaluated using a pre-test–post-test design to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme, and found significant improvements in communication between parents and children, which had a positive impact on family functioning (Lachman et al., 2016).

The literature presented above supports the inclusion of communication and problem-solving in the Family Affairs parenting programme. The studies by Benzies et al. (2008), Ward et al. (2019), Cluver et al. (2018), Bhana et al. (2004), and Lachman et al. (2016), which used different evaluation methodologies, showed that parenting programmes can improve parents' communication skills and problem-solving abilities. These findings are aligned to those of the study of Smit et al. (2018) in South Africa. Effective communication is an essential skill in positive parenting, as it leads to greater emotional expression, reduced physical discipline, and more positive approaches to problem-solving and conflict resolution (Cluver et al., 2018; Ward et al., 2019).

2.2.4 *Improved parent–child relationships*

The Family Affairs parenting programme seeks to also improve the parents' competencies in parenting, with the expectation that, as parents increasingly apply these skills, their relationship with their children will improve. There is research that shows that parenting programmes have a positive impact on the quality of the parent–child relationship.

The Nobody's Perfect Program is a Canadian parenting skills programme aimed at improving parents' resourcefulness and their relationships with their children (Chislett & Kennett, 2007). Chislett and Kennett (2007) conducted an outcome evaluation whereby participants were asked to complete pre-test and post-test measures. The findings showed that parents who had participated in the programme had post-intervention scores that were higher, with one of the constructs measured being parent–child relationship. In the Nobody's Perfect study (Chislett & Kennett, 2007), parenting outcomes and parents' relationship with their children correlated with the number of sessions the parent had attended; thus, the more sessions the parents attended, the greater the improvements were in the parent–child relationship. However, a limitation of the study is that its findings were obtained over a short-term period, and it is not clear whether these results are sustainable.

A mixed-methods pre- and post-test evaluation of the Incredible Years parenting programme in the South African context provides strong evidence that the programme significantly improved parental knowledge and parent–child interactions (Lachman et al, 2016). The reported effect size for improvements in parental knowledge was as 0.74, indicating a large effect of parents reported increased understanding of positive child discipline and supporting strategies. Parent–child relationship improvements were also observed, with an effect size of 0.66, indicating a moderate to large effect size. As noted in the Nobody's Perfect evaluation, the Family Affairs programme should consider long-term follow-ups to evaluate the sustainability of improvements in parent–child relationships over time. Generally, these findings provide strong support for the plausibility of the Family Affairs programme's theory in achieving improved parent–child relationships based on Walsh's (2002) family resilience theory. Kritzinger and White (2021) also evaluated the Incredible Years parenting programme's impact on parent–child relationships in South Africa, and also found a moderately large improvement in parent–child relationships, with effect size of 0.58.

Smith and Molepo (2022) evaluated the outcomes of the Positive Parenting Programme in South Africa and concluded that the programme yielded significant improvements in parent–child relationships. The effect sizes were notable for improved knowledge, translating to improved parenting approaches, with the effect size of 0.82, and a more moderate effect of 0.58 for a decrease in children's adverse conduct, which enhanced the parent–child relationship (Smith & Molepo, 2022).

Shenderovich et al. (2018), in a study of a Parenting for Lifelong Health programme in South Africa, found that parents reported better communication and engagement with their children, leading to healthier relationships between the parents and their children (Shenderovich et al., 2018). However, unlike the results of Lachman et al.'s (2016) study, the effect size in improvements in parent–child interactions were small, and Shenderovich et al. (2018) indicated the need to consider other issues that affect the outcomes, such as parents' level of participation in the programme (Shenderovich et al., 2018). Shenderovich et al. (2018) used a quantitative approach, while Lachman et al. (2016) combined quantitative measures with qualitative interviews for a deeper exploration of participant outcomes. Both evaluation studies highlight the value of examining parent participation in determining programme effectiveness.

While the methodologies of the programmes and the evaluation studies discussed above differ, the findings are consistent that parenting programmes can effectively address parent–child relationships in the South African context. This provides support for the programme theory of the Family Affairs programme in achieving the desired outcome of improving parent–child relationships, which is an outcome of Walsh's (2002) family resilience theory.

2.2.5 *Improved parenting styles*

Some group-based parenting programmes implemented in South Africa have demonstrated significant improvements in parents' parenting styles (e.g., Bowers, 2021; Clarke, 2020), especially within the three main styles of authoritative, permissive, and authoritarian parenting. For example, the Positive Parenting Program provides parents with resources to enhance their parenting style (Smith & Molepo, 2022). Smith and Molepo's (2022) evaluation of the Positive Parenting Program, using a quasi-experimental design, found shifts from permissive and authoritarian parenting towards authoritative parenting, consistent with the programme's goal of a supportive and communicative parenting style, with an effect size of 0.7. Specifically, parents showed improvements in setting clear, consistent expectations and maintaining boundaries and consistent discipline, all while providing warmth and support (Smith & Molepo, 2022).

Clarke (2020) conducted a meta-analysis of Incredible Years programme outcomes in South Africa and found large improvements towards an authoritative parenting style outcome, with effect sizes ranging from 0.5 to 0.7, which positively impacted positive parent–child relationships. Using the pre- and post-tests outcome evaluation design to evaluate a cluster of Parenting for Lifelong Health intervention, Bhana et al. (2004) found significant improvements in parents' assertive parenting style. The findings of Smith and Molepo's (2022) study and Clarke's (2020) review of the Incredible Years programmes over time and space also indicate significant improvements in parenting style. From the above, it is clear that the literature reports consistent positive findings with regard to improved parenting styles in the South African context, providing theoretical support to the plausibility of the Family Affairs programme in achieving its intended outcomes of improving parenting styles, in line with Walsh's (2002) theory of family resilience. Walsh's (2002) family resilience theory provides a framework that supports the importance of perceived parenting knowledge in improving parenting style. As

parents better understand their parenting style, parents can enhance their family's belief systems, organizational processes, and communication patterns, which can lead to contributing to increase in family resilience and more effective parenting.

In conclusion, the literature, overall, provides substantial support through empirical evidence of the individual interventions underpinning the Family Affairs parenting programme offered by Life Choices (2022), which is based in Walsh's (2002) theory of family resilience. The literature review addressed both long- and short-term outcomes, and it is plausible that the Family Affairs parenting programme will improve parenting skills, leading to enhanced behaviour of children and, ultimately, parents who are able to deliver competent, quality parenting. However, it needs to be borne in mind that, while the programmes reviewed above are similar to the Family Affairs parenting programme, the evaluations differed in their design and goals, and the researchers employed various methodologies. These considerations are discussed in the subsequent section.

2.3 Comparison of Family Affairs and other parenting programmes — context and foci

This section provides a summary and comparison of the discussion of the Family Affairs parenting programme compared in some other countries other than South Africa, highlighting similarities and differences in their foci in improving parenting skills and parent–child outcomes, followed by an overview of the differences in the methodologies employed to measure the effectiveness of parenting programmes.

Research has found that these programmes are effective in preventing emotional and conduct challenges in children and adolescents, in reducing violence against children, and in improving parenting skills and parent–child relationships (Cluver et al., 2016, 2018, 2021; Lachman et al., 2014). Thus, context must be considered in designing programmes and conducting evaluations on their effectiveness. Most evaluation research on parenting programmes has been conducted in Western settings, but increasing numbers of evaluations are being inducted in less prosperous socio-economic contexts (Gardner et al., 2016; Knerr et al., 2013), including in South Africa (e.g., Karjalainen et al., 2019; Knerr et al., 2013; Lachman et al., 2017; Shenderovich et al., 2019; Steinert et al., 2016; Ward et al., 2020). South African group-based parenting programme evaluations are gaining momentum and are contributing to evidence-

based practices in improving parenting and parent–child relationships (Cluver & Gardner, 2016; Lachman et al., 2016, 2018; Shenderovich et al., 2019; Wessels, 2012).

While the Family Affairs parenting programme is implemented in the Cape Flats areas of Cape Town, it shares similarities with other group-based parenting training programmes aimed at a global audience, such as the Incredible Years (Menting et al., 2013), the Positive Parenting Program (Sanders et al., 2014), Parent Management Training (Forgatch & Patterson, 2010), Parent–Child Interaction Therapy (Thomas et al., 2017), and the International Child Development Programme (Skar et al., 2014), especially with regard to a focus on improving parenting skills and improving parent–child outcomes in poor families (Knerr et al., 2013).

Evaluation research has demonstrated that parenting programmes can successfully improve parenting and parent–child interactions using various strategies, with a focus on, for example, social and emotional skills, positive discipline, positive reinforcement, clear communication, behaviour modification, and consistent discipline in the management of children’s behaviour and the building of a supportive family environment. Knerr et al. (2013) conducted a systematic review of parenting interventions in low- and middle-income countries, providing evidence of their effectiveness. Menting et al. (2013) conducted a meta-analytic review showing the effectiveness of Incredible Years in changing disruptive child behaviour. Sanders et al. (2014) performed a systematic review and meta-analysis that demonstrated the effectiveness of the Positive Parenting Program in different desired parenting outcomes. Forgatch and Patterson (2010) provided evidence supporting the effectiveness of Parent Management Training in addressing antisocial behaviour in children and adolescents. Thomas et al. (2017) conducted a meta-analysis showing the effectiveness of Parent–Child Interaction Therapy in different child- and parent outcomes. Skar et al. (2014) evaluated the follow-up effects of the International Child Development Programme on caregivers in Mozambique, which study demonstrated positive outcomes.

A comparison between the Family Affairs parenting programme and other parenting interventions highlights the importance of adapting evidence-based practices to fit local contexts while maintaining the standard of effective parenting interventions (Cluver et al., 2019; Lachman et al., 2016; Ward et al., 2020). Not all programmes designed for a global audience will necessarily yield all the desired outcomes in every context.

The Family Affairs parenting programme's emphasis on building parental resilience, communication skills, and problem-solving aligns with the goals of international parenting interventions, highlighting the value of adapting global best practices, but with consideration of the local context to effectively support families. While each programme has its unique strengths and limits, they are generally more effective if they are designed with consideration of a specific context, include competent facilitators, are implemented with high level of programme fidelity, and are tailored to the specific needs of parents and children of the target population (Almeida et al., 2022; Barlow et al., 2016; Bornstein et al., 2022; Gubbels et al., 2019; McGoron et al., 2019).

The Family Affairs parenting programme seems to differ from the international parenting programmes reviewed in its comprehensive packaging of services tailored to meet the needs of the parents and children of the society it serves through the incorporation of community engagement, specifically 'gift-giving' in the form of a community service project or a gift to an organisation or support services that address psychosocial and economic challenges faced by parents in poor socio-economic circumstances.

However, it must be borne in mind that a critical area of difference between the Family Affairs parenting programme and other widely evaluated and globally implemented parenting programmes lies in the methodologies used in evaluation. The Family Affairs parenting programme uses a retrospective pre-test–post-test self-reported evaluation design, where participants assess their own skills and knowledge. This approach has been criticised for potential response bias (Allen & Nimon, 2007). Globally implemented parenting programmes are usually evaluated using the more robust methodologies of randomised controlled trials and quasi-experimental designs to evaluate programme outcomes, and thus provide more robust evidence of programme outcomes (Bornstein et al., 2021; Jeong et al., 2021).

2.4 Conclusion

The review of the plausibility of the programme theory underpinning the Family Affairs parenting programme was aimed at addressing the gap in literature on the effectiveness of such programmes in the South Africa context. The Family Affairs programme was adapted to the specific needs of the Cape Flats community, in order to address local issues such as harsh parenting, family violence, and youth risk behaviours, to enhance its potential effectiveness.

This tailored approach aligns with the findings of Shenderovich et al. (2018), who highlight the importance of considering context and participant engagement in programme's success. The review of the literature on evaluations of parenting programmes presented in this chapter shows considerable support for the dimensions addressed in the Family Affairs parenting programme, which are based in Walsh's (2002) theory of family resilience. However, the review also highlighted the fact that many programmes were developed for and studied in a Western context using various methodologies. Nevertheless, the pre-test–post-test outcome evaluation design used in the present study has been applied in previous research, and a number of the studies reviewed were conducted in developing-country contexts. From the review of literature, it is clear that the Family Affairs programme's approach contains evidence-based interventions, and the fact that it was tailored to the needs of the community it serves increases the likelihood of its effectiveness. The next section discusses the methodology followed in conducting the present study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methodology employed to evaluate the outcomes of the Family Affairs parenting programme. The present study was an outcome evaluation, which is aimed at assessing the extent to which a programme achieves its intended effects on the target population (Chen, 2005; Mouton, 2014; Rossi et al., 2004). This chapter describes the present study's approach, design, population and sampling, and methods of data collection and analysis. The chapter also discusses the rationale for using secondary data and explains the outcome evaluation framework. This is followed by an overview of the ethical considerations pertinent to the study and, lastly, the methodological and other limitations of the outcome's evaluation.

3.2 Research approach

The present study followed a quantitative research approach, which is the collection of numerical data for statistical analysis (Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). A quantitative approach was deemed appropriate as the evaluation was aimed at measuring specific, quantifiable outcomes of parenting knowledge and skills, using a large sample ($n = 306$). While a mixed-methods approach incorporating qualitative data could have provided richer insights into participants' experiences, together with an opportunity for data triangulating (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Cronholm, 2011; Wallwey & Kajfez, 2023), resource constraints and the focus on measurable outcomes led to the selection of a purely quantitative approach.

Smith et al. (2022) note that collecting primary data is often expensive and time-consuming, while secondary, i.e., data collected for other purposes, are readily available. The current evaluation used secondary data on the Family Affairs programme. The secondary data were in the form of questionnaires parents and caregivers had completed after completion of the Family Affairs parenting programme. The data were sourced from Life Choices's programme managers, who collect data from participants who have completed the programme, using retrospective pre- and post-programme questionnaires, administered simultaneously (see Appendix D: Family Affairs Baseline Survey 2018, Appendix, Family Affairs Post Survey 2018, Appendix E: Family Affairs Post Survey 2019 and 2020). The contents of the

questionnaire are discussed in the section on data collection.

3.3 Research design

The present study followed a pre-test–post-test outcome evaluation design, which is often chosen for its efficiency and cost-effectiveness in programme evaluation (Allen & Nimon, 2007; Nimon et al., 2011; Pratt et al., 2000). Adults living in low socio-economic community settings are often impacted by a variety of challenges that could prevent them from consistently participating in programmes. This design allows for data collection at a single point in time, which could be particularly advantageous in evaluating community-based programmes and participants with limited time and resources (Allen & Nimon, 2007; Talari & Goyal, 2020). The choice of design was influenced by the nature of the organisation under study, a non-profit organisation, Life Choices, that is limited by resource challenges in collecting primary data. Hence, available (secondary) data on the Family Affairs programme data was utilised.

The retrospective pre-test–post-test outcome evaluation design helps mitigate response-shift bias — when participants' understanding of the concepts being measured changes as result of the programme (Howard et al., 1979, as cited in Hill & Betz, 2005). This is particularly relevant to parenting programmes where participants may gain new insights into their parenting practices. The use of a retrospective pre-test design mitigates the change of participants' responses pre- and post-intervention by using the same frame of reference for understanding of concepts, with participants rating themselves with regard to these concepts, thereby limiting the chances of participants overestimating their pre-intervention knowledge and skills. The design has been recognised as particularly useful for evaluating development programmes such as parenting programmes that measure improvements in parenting skills and knowledge (Davis, 2002; O'Leary & Israel, 2013; Stevens & Lodl, 1999).

The design allows participants to report their perceived improvement, which can be valuable in understanding the subjective impact of the programme on parents (Allen & Nimon, 2007; Lamb, 2005; Pratt et al., 2000). This is particularly relevant in measuring parental self-efficacy, one of the outcomes focused on in the present study, which is addressed in many parenting interventions (e.g., Jones & Prinz, 2005; Wittkowski et al., 2017; Woolgar et al., 2023). Nimon et al. (2011) conducted a study comparing different ways of measuring the effectiveness of training programmes against using retrospective pre-test data, and their findings showed that

retrospective pre-test measures are especially effective in measuring self-reported changes in participants' knowledge and skills (Nimon et al., 2011).

Other authors have also examined the use of pre-test–post-test data gathered simultaneously in evaluating parenting programmes and found that retrospective measures were less open to response-shift bias (Hill & Betz, 2005), and were more effective in capturing self-reported changes in parenting knowledge and behaviours (Lamb, 2005), compared to the traditional pre-test–post-test outcome evaluation design. The retrospective pre-test is a useful measure to detect bias in self-report measures involving skill-based variables, amongst others (Allen & Nimon, 2007). Klatt and Taylor-Powell (2005) concluded that the pre-test–post-test data gathered simultaneously has greater validity in the estimation of programme effects than the pre-test–post-test evaluation, which may either overestimate or underestimate programme effects.

This design was therefore considered appropriate for the present study. At the end of the sixth session of the programme, programme participants completed a pre-test and then a post-test survey measurement, recalling their knowledge and behaviours before participating and after participating in the intervention. Retrospective pre-tests and post-tests are administered only once, after the programme has ended, which is more convenient for participants, compared to traditional pre-test and later post-test outcome evaluations (Allen & Nimon, 2007; Gall et al., 2003).

3.4 Population and sampling

The target population of the present study comprised parents and caregivers in Cape Flats communities who had participated in the Family Affairs parenting programme in either 2018, 2019, or 2020. These communities, chosen by the programme managers and staff of Family Affairs, are located in the following areas: Bellville, Bonteheuwel, Delft, Khayelitsha, Bonteheuwel, Bishop Lavis, Kenilworth, Mannenberg, Mfuleni, and Philippi. The Cape Flats is known as areas with high incidences of alcoholism, drug abuse, violence, crime, and gangsterism, with a significant negative impact on children. The population included main caregivers in the form of biological, adoptive, or foster parents and relatives, for example, grandparents, collective referred to as ‘caregivers’ in this study. The criterion for inclusion in the study was participation in at least four workshop sessions in one of the years under study

(2018 to 2020).

The questionnaires were administered to parents and caregivers by Family Affairs after completion of the parenting programme. From the completed questionnaires, participants were sampled using random sampling, which yielded a total sample of 306, divided into three cohorts, one each for the years 2018, 2019, and 2020. The sample was distributed as follows: 126 participants (41.2%) for 2018, 130 participants (42.5%) for 2019, and 50 (16.3%) for 2020. The total sample consisted of 85.33% self-identified women, with the following self-indicated racial representation: black African: 57.5%, Coloured: 59.33%, and white: 3.5%. The ages of participants across the three cohorts were between 20 years to 68 years.

At the time the questionnaires were completed, 266 programme participants indicated that they were currently caring for children under the age of 18 years. While 40 participants indicated they were not caring for children under the age of 18 years at the time of completion of the questionnaire, their data were included because they were caring for children under the age of 18 years when they participated in the programme. Furthermore, these 40 participants were intermittently caring for grandchildren or other young relatives at the time of completion of the questionnaire.

3.5 Data collection questionnaire and administration of questionnaire

The data for the present study were collected from the survey instrument developed and disseminated by programme managers to participants in the Family Affairs parenting programme. The instrument obtains participant's written consent (see Appendix C) to collect their information and process it for learning- and research purposes. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire after they had been given instructions on how to complete it. Both the pre-programme and post-programme questionnaire opened with the following: "Please answer every question. If you have any questions, please ask the Life Choices researcher for assistance. It is very important that you answer HONESTLY; no one will judge you for your answers! Remember your answers will be kept confidential."

The survey took approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete, but no time limit was imposed. The instrument gathered the following data:

The **pre-programme questionnaire** comprised five sections.

Section 1, which comprised seven items, gathered biographical information on the programme participants, including the age of the child or children in their care.

Section 2 contained 30 items on personal development, e.g., “I feel positive about my future” and “I feel that life is unfair”.

Section 3 contained 16 items focused on the programme participants’ interactions with the children in their care, e.g., “My children listen to me” and “My family follows a structure daily routine”. In responding to Sections 2 and 3, programme participants were asked to: “Think about your children and family in the last 2 months”. Each item was rated on a five-point response scale: 1 = “Never”, 2 = “Some of the time”, 3 = “About 50% of the time”, 4 = “Most of the time”, and 5 = “All the time”.

Section 4 contained four items about the programme participants’ personal knowledge, e.g., “I know what my children’s temperaments are” and “I know what my style of parenting is (i.e. authoritative, permissive or authoritarian”. Programme participants were asked to: “Think about yourself NOW” and respond to each item on a five-point scale: 1 = “Strongly disagree”, 2 = “Disagree”, 3 = Neutral, 4 = “Agree”, and 5 = “Strongly agree”.

Section 5 comprised three items on parenting style, e.g., “Spanking my children is an example of... (tick one)”, and programme participants had to select one of four options: “Authoritative parenting style”, “Permissive parenting style”, “Authoritarian parenting style”, or “I don’t know”.

The **post-programme survey** comprised three sections.

Section 1 again collected biographical information through the first six items. Item 7 asked that participants indicate which sessions they remembered, e.g., “Understanding Children’s Needs and Stages of Development” and “Children’s Temperaments and Parenting Styles”. The subsequent part of Section 1 contained 12 items that gathered programme participants views on the Family Affairs programme, e.g., “The facilitators were well prepared” and “I understood the content”, to which participants had to indicate their response on a four-point scale ranging from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”. Items 13 and 14 asked programme participants

to rate the job counselling they had received, if applicable, and whether they had managed to secure a job. In Item 16, participants were asked to rate the one-on-one therapy they had received and to what extent they found it helpful.

Section 2, which contained 30 items on participants' views about themselves, opened with: "Think back before you started the Family Affairs programme and think about yourself now." Examples of items in section are: "I feel positive about my future" and "I criticise myself", with response options ranging from 1 = "Strongly disagree" to "5 = "Strongly agree".

Section 3 gathered data on the programme participants' relationships with their children before and after completion of the programme, e.g., "My children listen to me", which participants had to rate on a scale of 1 to 4.

Give yourself a score out of 10 before the programme and now for each of the following (1 = Very poor; 10 = Excellent).

3.6 Data analysis

The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27), a quantitative data analysis software package. The following analyses were performed:

Reliability analysis: Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of questionnaire.

Descriptive statistics: Measures of central tendency and dispersion were calculated for each variable; and

Inferential statistics: the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used for before–after comparisons, and the Kruskal-Wallis test was used for comparisons across cohorts.

Non-parametric tests were conducted due to violations of normality assumptions in some variables (see Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). The constructs of interest were self-reported *parental self-development*, *parent–child relationship*, and increased awareness of *parenting style*. The analysis commenced with determining the internal consistency (reliability) of the questionnaire scales. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was calculated as a measure of the internal consistency of the instrument, with alpha coefficients greater than 0.70 indicating adequate internal consistency (see Hajjar, 2018; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Once reliability had been established, scores for *Parental self-development*, *Parent–child relationship*, and *Parenting style* were derived as the sum of responses to the items within each scale.

For the *Parenting style* analysis, the 2018 cohort was separated from the other two cohorts (2019 and 2020), as the items for this section were different in the respective questionnaires. The mean and median scores were calculated to identify any differences between before and after the programme. To determine if the observed differences were significant, tests for statistical significance using the Wilcoxon signed rank test were carried out. The separate analyses facilitated comparability, measurement consistency, and statistical integrity (see Field, 2018), as, due to the differences in the questionnaire items between cohorts, direct comparisons were problematic.

Descriptive analysis was carried out by computing descriptive summary statistics for each of the constructs measured and line plots of the means and medians (Park, 2015). The minimum, lower quartile, mean, median, upper quartile, maximum, standard deviation, and interquartile range were determined for each construct before and after completion of the parenting programme.

The inferential analysis was conducted to compare the scores before and after completion of the parenting programme and across cohorts.

Before conducting t-tests or analysis of variance (ANOVA), tests were performed to check if the data met the necessary assumptions for these statistical methods (see Field, 2018; Mertler Levene's test for equality of variances was used (see Field, 2018). However, given that not all the constructs satisfied this assumption of homogeneity of variance, and in the interest of uniformity, the decision was made to adopt a non-parametric approach to the comparison of the constructs by cohort and over time (before–after). As such, the nonparametric counterparts of the t-test and ANOVA, namely the Wilcoxon's signed rank test and the Kruskal-Wallis test, were used for the before–after comparison and the comparison across cohorts (see Field, 2018), respectively.

The next section discusses the ethical considerations that were pertinent to the study.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained from the University of Cape Town's Faculty Ethics in Research Committee (see Appendix A). Permission to conduct the evaluation was obtained from Family Affairs programme managers (see Appendix B). Family Affairs managers had obtained informed consent from all programme participants (see Appendix C). All participants were fully informed about the evaluation process, including the purpose, methods, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as participants, including the right not to participate. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and no personal identifiers were used in the reporting in this dissertation. The data received from Family Affairs were kept in secure password-protected files in Life Choices's cloud storage facility.

The next section details the limitations of the study.

3.8 Limitations of the study

The study contributes valuable insights, but, due to the specificity of the programme and context, the results regarding the effectiveness of the Family Affairs parenting programme may not be generalisable, due to a number of limitations.

The study's outcome evaluation design did not allow for the identification of causal relationships, and the data were of insufficient quality to determine treatment- and comparison groups for both before and after programme implementation groups. For example, the consistency of measured outcomes of the programme, the accuracy and timeliness of data collected, could not be established.

It is important to note that the results are based on self-reported data, and that before-and-after data were collected simultaneously, relying on participants' recall, which may have introduced recall bias (see Allen & Nimon, 2007; Blome & Augustin, 2016; Pratt et al., 2000; Talari & Goyal, 2020). Participants' memories of their initial skills and knowledge could have been influenced by their experiences during the programme, which may have led to overexaggeration or underestimation of the effects of the programme. Gertler et al. (2016) maintain that retrospective evaluations are limited because the chances of obtaining a valid comparison group are limited because the existing data restrict the ability to accurately measure

the impact of the intervention with what would have happened in the absence of a programme.

Another limitation of the retrospective design, especially when the researcher did not participate in programme design and assessment, as was the case with the Family Affairs parenting programme evaluation, is that the data gathered may not be of the highest quality, and the researcher has an incomplete understanding of how the programme was rolled out (Gertler et al, 2016).

Without a control group, it is difficult to determine the effects of the Family Affairs programme in isolation, as other factors may have played a role in the reported outcomes (see McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006; Newcomer, 1997; Paulus et al., 2013). There is a need to further investigate the Family Affairs parenting programme using robust methods to determine potential causal mechanisms that conclusively determine positive and negative effects of the programme. Pratt et al. (2000) note that, while single-group designs can measure change, they lack the ability to control for external factors, which a control group provides.

All measures relied on participants' self-reports, which may have been influenced by social desirability bias, as programme participants may have wished to be perceived or evaluated positively, especially given the sensitive topic of parenting (see Caputo, 2017; Krumpal, 2013; Latkin et al., 2017). Participants may also have held a desire to support the effectiveness of the programme because they had participated in it (see Geldhof et al., 2018). These limitations, however, can be mitigated by building trust with respondents and assure them of anonymity (Blair et al., 2015), which was done by Family Affairs managers. In addition, the accuracy of the self-reports may have been affected by the participants' ability to accurately recall events and changes over time.

The evaluation only assessed short-term outcomes, immediately after programme completion. Longer-term follow-up would provide more insight into the sustainability of effects observed. A meta-analysis by Tolan et al. (2013) of parent training programmes found that improvements in child behaviour tended to decrease over time, which was determined in later follow-up assessments (Dishion et al., 2014). This indicates the need for longer-term evaluation to capture what is referred to as ' sleeper effects ', or to discover delayed programme outcomes (Olds et al., 2007).

The Family Affairs programme is negatively impacted by selection and sampling biases as its participants are usually voluntarily recruited without careful selection across participating communities (Powell, 1988b). For example, the selection of participants who completed at least four sessions may limit selection to participants who are motivated to attend or have fewer barriers to participation, compared to those who dropped out earlier, and who may have needed the programme the most. This can lead to an overestimation of programme effects (Eyberg et al., 2001; Nock & Ferriter, 2005).

Additionally, voluntary recruitment without careful selection across communities may result in a sample that is not representative of the target group. Haggerty et al. (2002) highlights that self-selected cohorts in parenting interventions often over-represent their responses. Furthermore, there were no assessments done at the time of the baseline assessment to determine differentiating factors between participants that would help control for possible mediating and predisposing factors that may have influenced the perceived outcomes of the programme, for example, participants having recently participated in another parenting programme.

A significant limitation is the absence of qualitative data to complement the quantitative results. A mixed-methods study would have provided richer insights into participants' experiences, challenges, and the specific programme elements they found most beneficial (see Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Palinkas et al., 2011). Qualitative interviews or focus groups could also have uncovered unexpected outcomes or implementation issues.

The evaluation data obtained from Family Affairs do not indicate how strictly the programme was implemented according to the design across different cohorts and facilitators. While the Family Affairs programme has a structured curriculum, its adoption and use depend on such factors as facilitators' skill and the intensity of programme delivery (Cluver et al., 2018) and participant-specific differences and their propensity to change (Cluver et al., 2018; Dembo et al., 1985). Shenderovich et al. (2019) conducted a study within a randomised controlled trial of the Sinovuyo Teen parenting programme in South Africa and found that facilitator fidelity, participant attendance, and engagement were significantly associated with some participant outcomes.

These factors are likely to have impacted the results of the programme, but they were not

controlled for. For example, some parents could have had more experienced facilitators facilitate their sessions. Some parents attended more sessions and were more willing or motivated to change than other parents, which could have affected the scores participants awarded the programme outcomes.

The present study did not control for external factors that may have influenced the outcomes of the programme. When conducting an outcome evaluation, it is important to control for potentially confounding variables. Without controlling for external factors, such as programme facilitators having a better education, greater facilitation skills and experience, not all improvements may be attributable to the programme (Shenderovich et al., 2019). Consequently, failure to account for confounding factors threatens the internal validity of the evaluation (Mosley, 2001; Stattin et al., 2015). In order to address these limitations, future evaluations of Family Affairs could collect data on factors that may potentially influence the outcomes, such as participant demographics and facilitator characteristics, and use a control group to help identify programme-only effects and statistical techniques like propensity score matching to control for confounders (Gertler et al., 2016).

The use of different items to measure outcomes related to *Parenting style* in 2018 versus 2019 to 2020 limited direct comparisons across all three years. It is important to establish consistency in measurements, the time frames covered, and the approach to data collection across cohorts, so that more robust intervention- and the counterfactual group data can be obtained. Gertler et al. (2016) highlight the importance of using consistent measurement instruments across time periods and cohorts to make valid comparisons and ensure internal and external validity of an evaluation.

The inclusion of participants who were not caring for children under the age of 18 years at the time of data-gathering may have affected results of the outcomes. These participants may have struggled to accurately recall their experiences, thus leading to less reliable data (Gertler et al., 2016). Additionally, some of the measured outcomes related to current parenting practices may have been less relevant to these participants (see Rossi et al., 2004), thus leading to poor validity of the measures used for them.

The 2020 cohort's experiences may have been uniquely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, potentially confounding comparisons with earlier cohorts. The 2020 cohort may have

experienced inordinately high levels of stress due to lockdowns, threats to their livelihood, and health-related fears. Griffith et al. (2020), using the retrospective pre-test methods, found significant increases in parental burnout and negative parenting practices during the pandemic, compared to pre-pandemic levels. Prime et al. (2020) and Prime et al. (2020) found that stress levels due to the pandemic were associated with increased family conflict and harsher parenting. The pandemic period was an extraordinary time of increased uncertainty, anxiety, and fear, which impacted individuals' mental health, and future research should investigate whether the effects of parenting interventions delivered during the pandemic were sustained over time (Brito et al., 2021). The pandemic may also have negatively affected programme reach (see Chung et al., 2020). These limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of the present study and be addressed in future evaluations.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter detailed the methodology followed in the study, including the quantitative research approach, the retrospective pre-test–post-test outcome evaluation design, the population, and sampling. The instrument used by the Family Affairs parenting programme to gather data from programme participants was discussed in detail, followed by an overview of the statistical analyses conducted to analyse the data. The next chapter presents the results of the analyses.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis, starting with the reliability of the scales, followed by the results of the descriptive and inferential statistics, the results for *Parental self-development*, *Parent–child relationship*, and *Parenting style*, cohort comparison, and before–after comparisons. The chapter concludes with a review of the main findings, together with conclusions and implications.

4.1 Reliability of scales

This section establishes the reliability of the measurement scales used in the study, which is important in ensuring accurate interpretation of the quantitative results (Schmidt & Hunter, 1996). Reliability refers to the questionnaire items consistently measuring dimensions, so that the possibility of obtaining results due to random error or chance is eliminated (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008) maintain that showing the reliability of a questionnaire provides a foundation for establishing its validity. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for each construct before and after the parenting programme. As shown in Table 2, all scales demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with alpha coefficients exceeding the 0.70 threshold. This suggests that the questionnaire items reliably measured the intended constructs, providing a solid foundation for analysis.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of reliability, the number of items, and the cohort sizes are shown in the Table 2. The results showed that all scales demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, for both the 'Before' and 'After' measurements, as shown by Cronbach's alpha coefficients greater than the 0.70 threshold.

Table 2: Reliability analysis of the questionnaire by construct

Construct	Items	Before		After	
		<i>n</i>	alpha	<i>n</i>	alpha
<i>Parent self-development</i>	30	203	0.94	204	0.86
<i>Parent–child relationship</i>	16	213	0.88	225	0.87
<i>Parenting style (2018)</i>	4	104	0.82	110	0.82
<i>Parenting style (2019 & 2020)</i>	9	162	0.87	161	0.71

Once reliability had been established, the scores for *Parent self-development*, *Parent–child relationship*, and *Parenting style* scores were derived as the sum of responses to the items within each scale. The *Parent self-development* scores were values between 30 and 150, *Parent–child relationship* between 16 and 80, and *Parenting style* between 4 and 16. The following section outlines the statistical methods used in the analyses to answer the research questions.

4.2 Descriptive and inferential statistics

The analysis of the constructs was carried out in two parts, namely descriptive analysis and inferential analysis. The descriptive analysis was carried out by computing descriptive summary statistics for each of the constructs and line plots of the means and medians. This analysis allowed the evaluator to describe the data, visualise key trends, and then use statistical tests to determine if observed changes were significant. This analysis provided a platform for assessing the effectiveness of the parenting programme and identifying areas for potential improvement, thereby answering the evaluation questions in order to address the research sub-objectives, namely:

1. Does the parenting programme facilitate parents' self-development?
2. Are there improvements in parent–child relationships as a result of the programme?
3. Do parenting styles change as a result of participation in the programme?

Specifically, the minimum, lower quartile, mean, median, upper quartile, maximum, standard deviation, and interquartile range were determined for each construct before and after the parenting programme. In this section, only the line plots of medians are presented; the tables of all the statistics computed are attached as Appendix F. The descriptive analysis was based on plots of medians of the ‘Before’ and ‘After’ scores for each construct across the years. In the line plots, the time points refer to the points at which the participants rated and completed the questionnaire scales.

Inferential analysis was done to compare these constructs before and after the parenting programme and across cohorts. To determine the appropriate statistical method, tests for assumptions of the t-test and ANOVA were carried out. Levene’s test for equality of variances was used, the results of which are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Levene's test for equality of variances of scores across cohorts

Construct	Equality of variances		
	Levene	<i>p</i> -value	Result
<i>Parent self-development</i> (Before)	3.65	0.0277	Unequal
<i>Parent self-development</i> (After)	0.37	0.6911	Equal
<i>Parent–child relationship</i> (Before)	1.21	0.3006	Equal
<i>Parent–child relationship</i> (After)	5.53	0.0045	Unequal

The results show that only *Parent self-development* (‘After’) and *Parent–child relationship* (‘Before’) satisfied the assumption of equality of variances. Given that not all the variables satisfied this assumption, and in the interest of uniformity, the decision was made to adopt a non-parametric approach to the comparison of the variables by cohort and over time (‘Before–After’). The non-parametric counterparts of the t-test and ANOVA, namely, Wilcoxon’s signed rank test and the Kruskal-Wallis tests, were used for the ‘Before’ and ‘After’ comparison and the comparison across cohorts, respectively.

The next sections present results for specific aspects of the programme and the hypothesis that was tested for each construct (*Parental self-development*, *Parent–child relationship*, and *Parenting style*). Statistical analysis was conducted of perceived improvements according to each construct’s scores before and after the programme, together with a comparison of scores across the three cohorts (2018, 2019, and 2020). This is followed by an interpretation of the results.

4.3 Parental self-development

The hypothesis and alternative hypothesis for the *Parental self-development* construct were:

H0: The Family Affairs parenting programme does not significantly improve parental belief systems, family organisational patterns, communication, and parents’ problem-solving skills.

H2: The Family Affairs parenting programme significantly improves parents’ belief systems, family organisational patterns, communication, and parents’ problem-solving skills.

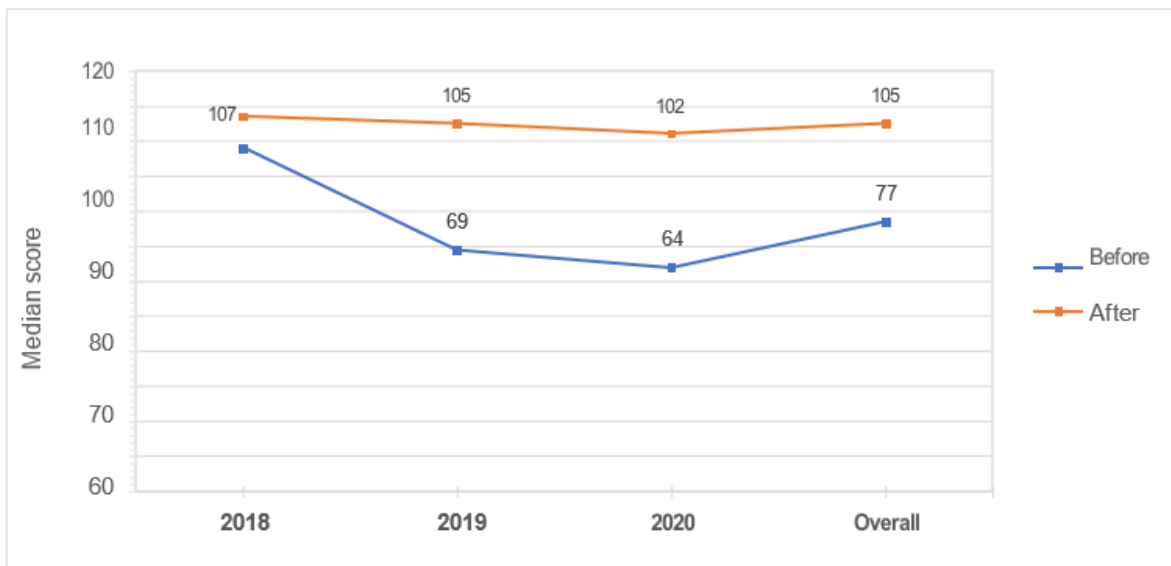
The analysis of *Parental self-development* scores revealed interesting patterns across cohorts and time points. Before the programme, there were significant differences amongst cohorts ($\chi^2(2) = 97.6$; $p = 0.0001$), with the 2018 cohort scoring the highest. This suggested that participants in different years entered the programme with varying self-perceived levels of development.

Importantly, there was a significant increase in perceived self-development after the programme across all cohorts ($Z = -11.01$; $p = 0.0001$). This improvement indicates that participants generally felt more positive about themselves and their future after completing the Family Affairs programme. For instance, the overall median score increased from 77 to 105, suggesting a shift from neutral responses to more positive self-perceptions. These results imply that the programme may have successfully enhanced participants perceived psychological well-being and self-efficacy.

Figure 2 shows the plot medians of the ‘Before’ and ‘After’ *Parental self-development* score for each cohort. The plot showed that, before the programme, the 2018 cohort had the highest median of 98, followed by 2019 cohort, with a median score of 69. The 2020 cohort had the lowest median, 64. The interquartile ranges of the scores for the three cohorts were 19.5, 23,

and 22 for 2018, 2019, and 2020, respectively. After completing the programme, the medians of *Parental self-development* for the 2018, 2019, and 2020 cohorts were 107, 105, and 102, respectively. The interquartile range was 17 for all three cohorts.

Figure 2: Median plots of *Parent self-development* by cohort before and after completion



of the programme

The plot in Figure 2 suggests that there was an increase in parents' self-development scores after they had completed the programme. The increase was more pronounced for the 2019 and 2020 cohorts. Furthermore, the differences between the cohorts seem to be more pronounced in the 'Before' scores than in the 'After' scores. To determine if these differences were statistically significant, tests for statistical significance were carried out. The results of the analysis are presented below.

4.3.1 Cohort comparison

The *Parental self-development* scores before the parenting programme were compared across the cohorts using the Kruskal-Wallis test. The results of that analysis showed that the perceived *Parental self-development* scores before the programme were significantly different across the

cohorts ($\chi^2(2) = 97.6; p = 0.0001$). The rank sums of the scores were 10832.5, 7264.0, and 2609.5 for the 2018, 2019, and 2020 cohorts, respectively. As noted, the 2018 cohort scored highest on the a similar comparison of the perceived *Parental self-development scores* after completion of the parenting programme. The results of the between-cohort comparison showed that the cohorts were significantly different ($\chi^2(2) = 6.7; p = 0.0351$ with ties). The rank sums of the scores were 8079.5, 9487.0, and 3343.5 for the 2018, 2019, and 2020 cohorts, respectively. The 2020 cohort's score was the lowest before and after completion of the programme.

4.3.2 Before–after comparison

The Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to compare the *Parental self-development scores* before and after participants had completed the Family Affairs parenting programme, to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference. The results showed that the scores before the parenting programme were significantly lower than the scores after the programme across the three cohorts ($Z = -11.01; p = 0.0001$).

In conclusion, the study found that the majority of the participants had a positive outlook, evident in the 'Before' median score of (77.0; IQR = 33), which were responses to items such as "I feel positive about my future" and "Every day I think about what I have to be grateful for". After completion of the Family Affairs programme, these scores improved, as shown by the higher median score (105; IQR = 18.0). This indicated that, after the programme, participants felt more positive about themselves and their lives, most of the time or all the time.

Based on this analysis, the null hypothesis, that the Family Affairs programme does not improve participants' self-development, is rejected. The results showed that the Family Affairs programme that most parents who complete the programme are grateful, confident, and believe they can make a difference in their own lives and in the lives of others, as postulated by Life Choices (2018).

4.4 Parent–child relationship

The following hypothesis and alternative hypothesis were formulated for the construct *Parent–child relationship*:

H0: The Family Affairs parenting programme does not improve parents' relationships with their children.

H3: The Family Affairs parenting programme does improve parents' relationships with their children.

Parent-child relationship scores showed significant differences amongst cohorts before the programme ($\chi^2(2) = 56.31; p = 0.0001$). This indicated that participants from different years started with differing perceptions of their relationships with their children. A key finding was the significant improvement in parent-child relationship scores across all cohorts after the programme ($Z = -11.19; p = 0.0001$). Participants reported better communication, more quality time spent together, and improved understanding of their children's needs. The median score increased from the range of 33 to 48 (depending on the cohort) to 52 to 57 after the programme.

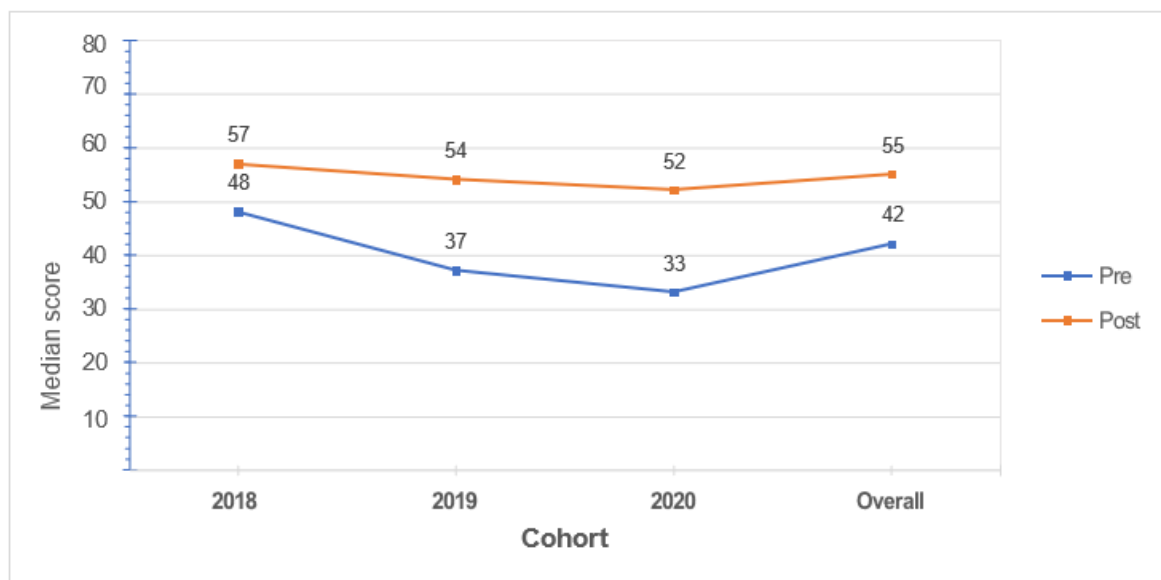


Figure 3 shows the plotted medians of *Parent-child relationship* scores for each cohort before and after participation in the programme.

Figure 3: Medians plot of *Parent-child relationship* by cohort before and after completion of the programme

Before the programme, the 2018 cohort had the highest median, at 48, followed by 2019 cohort, with a median score of 37. The 2020 cohort had the lowest median at 33. The interquartile ranges of the scores were 15, 11, and 18 for the 2018, 2019, and 2020 cohorts, respectively. After the programme, the medians of *Parent–child relationship* for the 2018, 2019, and 2020 cohorts were 57, 54, and 52, respectively. The interquartile ranges of the scores after the programme were 14, 10, and 11.5 for the three cohorts, respectively. The results in the Figure 3 indicate that the 2018 cohort scored higher than the other two cohorts.

The results in the Figure 3 suggest that the 2018 cohort scored higher than the other two cohorts, and that scores before the programme were lower than the scores after the programme. The differences between cohorts were more pronounced in the ‘Before’ scores than in the ‘After’ scores. To determine if these differences were statistically significant, tests for statistical significance were carried out. The results of the analysis are presented below.

4.4.1 Cohort comparison

The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to compare the *Parent–child relationship* scores before and after the parenting programme across the cohorts. The results showed that, for the ‘Before’ scores, one cohort’s score was significantly different from those of the others ($\chi^2(2) = 56.31$; $p = 0.0001$ with ties). The rank sums across the 2018, 2019, and 2020 cohorts showed that the 2018 cohort ranked the highest (1147.6), followed by the 2019 cohort (7864.5), and the 2020 cohort ranked the lowest (3450.5). With respect to scores after the parenting programme, it was found that there was a marginal significant difference amongst the cohorts ($\chi^2(2) = 6.033$; $p = 0.049$ with ties).

4.4.2 Before–after comparison

The results of Wilcoxon signed ranks test showed that the *Parent–child relationship* scores before the parenting programme were significantly lower than the scores after the programme ($Z = -11.19$; $p = 0.0001$). Based on this analysis, the null hypothesis, that the Family Affairs programme does not improve participants' relationships with their children is rejected. The results indicated that participants in the programme experienced an improvement in their interactions with, and their understanding of, their children, as posited by Life Choices (2018).

4.5 Parenting style

The following hypothesis and alternative hypothesis were formulated for the *Parenting style* construct:

H0: The Family Affairs programme does not improve perceived parental knowledge and style of parenting.

H4: The Family Affairs programme does improve perceived parental knowledge and style of parenting.

Due to differences in measurement between the 2018 cohort and the later cohorts, the data for *Parenting style* were analysed separately.

4.5.1 Cohort comparison

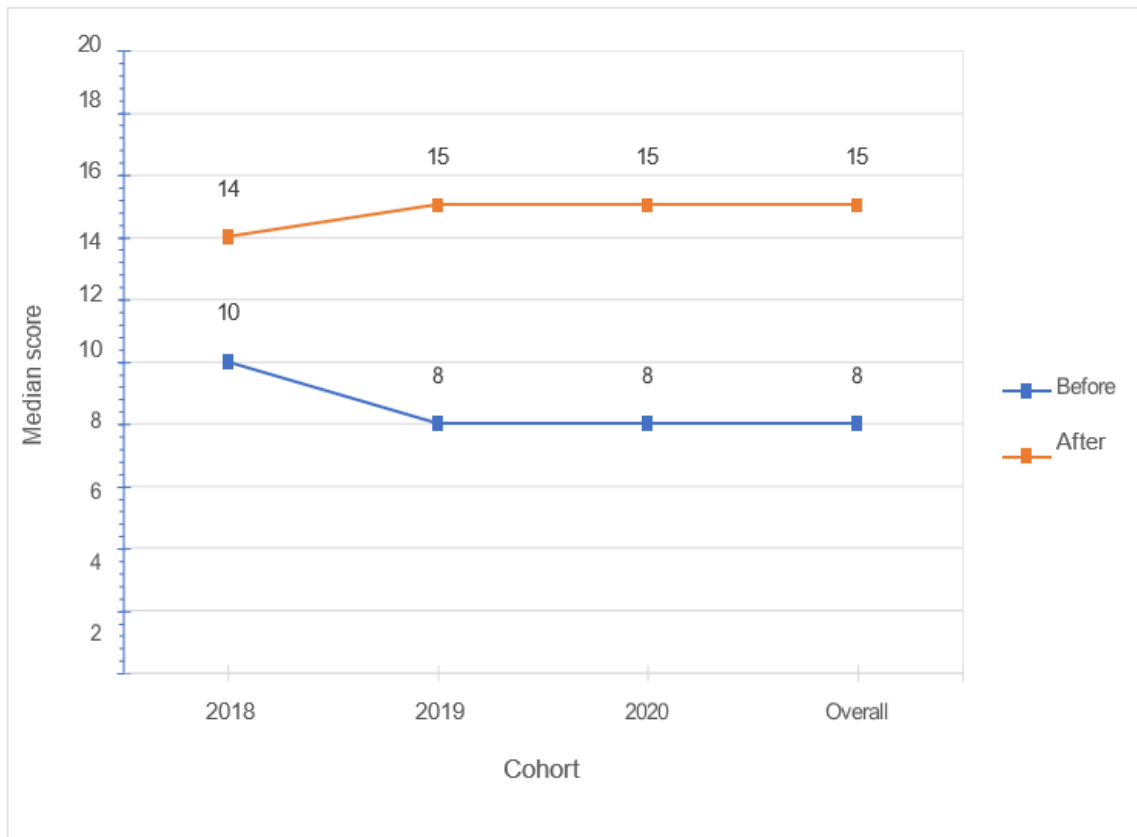
The results for both the 2018 cohort ($Z = -7.03$; $p = 0.0001$) and the 2019 and 2020 cohorts ($Z = -19.92$; $p = 0.0001$) showed a significant improvement in *Parenting style*.

4.5.2 Before–after comparison

For the 2019 and 2020 cohorts, the ‘After’ median score nearly doubled, from 8 to 15, indicating a substantial shift in participants' awareness and application of effective parenting techniques. This suggests that the programme is successful in educating parents about different parenting styles and helping them adopt a more positive approach. The ‘Before’ scores for *Parenting style* showed that none of the cohorts was able to identify their parenting style among the three parenting styles, namely authoritative, permissive, or authoritarian.

The results showed that the median for the 2018 cohort was 10 before the programme, and that it increased to 14 after the programme. The interquartile range decreased from 4.5 before the programme to 3 after the programme. For the 2019 and 2020 cohorts, the results were the same. Both medians were 8 and increased to 15 after completion of the programme. The interquartile range for the 2019 and 2020 cohorts was 5 before the programme and decreased to 3 after the programme. The results are illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Medians plot of *Parenting style* by cohort and before and after completion of the programme



Prior to the completing programme, most parents across all three cohorts were unaware of their parenting approaches in addressing children's needs and displays of aggression. The results after the intervention programme revealed that they had gained knowledge about the needs of their children, both physically and mentally. Evident from the medians, the differences between the 2019 and 2020 cohorts both before and after the programme did not seem significant. To determine if the observed differences were significant across all three cohorts, tests for statistical significance were carried out. The results are presented below.

The Wilcoxon signed rank test for the 2018 cohort showed that the *Parenting style* scores before the parenting programme were significantly lower than the scores after the programme ($Z = -7.03; p = 0.0001$). This means that the programme had a statistically significant positive effect on self-reported parenting style amongst the 2018 cohort. For the 2019 and 2020 cohorts, the *Parenting style* scores were significantly higher after the parenting programme than before

the programme ($Z = -19.92$; $p = 0.0001$), evidenced by the increase in median *Parenting style* score from 8 to 15.

In conclusion, prior to the intervention programme, most parents and caregivers in the 2018 cohort were unaware of their parenting style in meeting their children's needs dealing with aggression. The results after the programme revealed that they had gained insights into and improved their parenting style. However, the results of the 2018 cohort were not strictly comparable to those of the other two cohorts with respect to *Parenting style*, due to differences in the measurement of the construct in 2018 compared to 2019 and 2020.

For the 2019 and 2020 cohorts, the *Parenting style* scores before the programme ranged from 4 to 16, with a median score of 8.0. By the end of the programme, the median almost doubled, to a score of 15. This shows that there was a major improvement in the median scores after the intervention. Based on these results, the null hypothesis, that the Family Affairs parenting programme does not improve parental knowledge and style of parenting, is rejected.

4.6 Summary of findings

The study's results consistently showed improvements across all measured constructs after participation in the Family Affairs programme. The results suggest that the programme is effective in enhancing parental self-development, parent–child relationships, and promoting a more positive parenting style. This suggests that the programme may assist parents in developing greater self-efficacy, encourage them to build positive relationships with their children, and create awareness of their parenting style.

The Family Affairs parenting programme's outcomes show strong alignment with Walsh's (2002) theory of family resilience. The improvements in parental self-development, parent–child relationships, and parenting knowledge all contribute to strengthening the key domains Walsh (2002) identified as crucial to family resilience.

4.7 Conclusion

The chapter presented the results of the data analyses. Across all cohorts and for all constructs, the scores before the programme were significantly lower than the scores after the programme. This means that, over the three years under study, the Family Affairs parenting programme

yielded significant improvements in self-reported parental development, parents' relationships with their children, and parents' awareness of their parenting styles and progress towards a more positive parenting style. The next chapter discusses the findings, together with conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This outcome evaluation was aimed at assessing whether the Family Affairs parenting programme in its existing form is achieving the desired programme outcomes. This chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the results presented in Chapter 4. First, the results are interpreted, which is followed by the implications of the results and factors that fell outside the scope of the study that may have influenced the results. This is followed by recommendations for the programme managers of Family affairs and policymakers. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Overall, the study's results showed that, in the short term, the Family Affairs parenting programme produces the intended positive outcomes. These are discussed below in alignment with the study's research sub-objectives, which were as follows:

RSO1: To assess the extent to which the Family Affairs parenting programme enhances parents' belief systems, family organisational patterns, communication, and problem-solving skills.

RSO2: To examine the programme's positive impact on parent–child relationships; and

RSO3: To explore how programme participation contributes to the enhancement of perceived parental knowledge and style of parenting.

5.1 Improved parental self-development and self-efficacy

The current study found that most of the participants experienced increased positive self-development (a positive attitude and feelings) as a result of attending the programme. The results showed that the programme leads to an improvement in how families organise and work together. The programme also leads to improvements in how parents and caregivers communicate with the children in their care. A comparison of the results pre- and post-programme scores showed significant increases in parental self-development, family organisational patterns, communication, and problem-solving.

The results highlight the value of targeting parental self-efficacy in interventions aimed at enhancing both parent- and child outcomes. Specifically, the Family Affairs parenting programme yielded significant improvements in *Parental self-development* scores after the intervention, with median scores increasing from 77.0 to 105. The Family Affairs parenting

programme may thus have contributed to a reduction in some of the negative factors affecting the well-being of the parents and caregivers. For example, the results showed that, after attending the programme, most parents felt positive about their lives, had positive beliefs about themselves, and communicated more effectively with their children. Parents reported being grateful, being confident about their parenting style, and feeling that they can make a change to their life and their community. This is in stark contrast to the results before parents had attended the programme, which showed that most participants reported a negative psychological state, reflected in the low median scores across the three cohorts.

The results of the present study are aligned with those of previous research that demonstrated the importance of enhancing parenting in promoting positive parent outlook, confidence, emotional regulation, communication with children, and self-esteem in both parents and children (e.g., Barlow, 1999; Muzik et al., 2015; Ralph & Sanders, 2003; Riley et al., 2008).

Parental self-development and self-efficacy have been shown to be a crucial factor in effective parenting (Jones & Prinz, 2005; Smith et al., 2018). Previous research has demonstrated that parenting interventions can significantly improve parents' self-efficacy and psychological well-being (Jones & Brown, 2019). Systematic reviews (Albanese et al., 2019; Glatz et al., 2023; Leijten et al., 2018) have provided strong evidence supporting the effectiveness of parenting interventions in improving parents' self-efficacy and psychological well-being (Leijten et al., 2018). The meta-analysis by Sanders et al. (2014) on the Positive Parenting Program found significant positive effects on parenting practices and parental self-efficacy across various cultures.

The results of the present study are also aligned with those of Fetsch et al.'s (1999) evaluation of the RETHINK parenting and anger management programme using a pre-test–post-test design, which study found significant improvements in parenting skills and anger management after participating in the programme. A total of 94.7% of respondents reported making positive behavioural changes and achieving significant improvements in anger control. While not explicitly focused on anger management, the Family Affairs parenting programme showed improvements in parent self-development and communication, which may indirectly impact parents' anger management skills.

An evaluation of the Positive Discipline intervention demonstrated that parenting self-efficacy

scores improved from 25.00 to 36.29 (Cohen's $d = 3.156$) (Liu et al., 2024). Similarly to the Family Affairs parenting programme, the Positive Discipline intervention study found significant improvements in parental self-efficacy or self-development scores after the interventions, with parents feeling more positive about their parenting abilities and psychological well-being (Liu et al., 2024).

Based on the results of the present study, there is evidence that supports the claim that the Family Affairs programme contributes to improvement in how parents feel about themselves, i.e., participants demonstrated some psychological well-being and parenting self-efficacy, which, as part of the programme, is enhanced by the creation of support networks and psychosocial counselling that the broader programme offers.

The Family Affairs intervention is based on Walsh's (2002) family resilience framework, which emphasises the importance of belief systems in family resilience, including making meaning of adversity and maintaining a positive outlook. The self-reports of parents in the Family Affairs programme suggest that they adopted more empowering beliefs and attitudes, allowing them to make sense of challenging circumstances and respond in more positive, purposeful ways. This aligns with Walsh's (2002) emphasis on the crucial role of belief systems in fostering family resilience. As Walsh (2006) explained: "A family resilience approach aims to identify and fortify key processes that enable families to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges" (p. 7).

Specifically, parents reported improvements in several key areas after participating in the Family affairs programme:

Positive parenting beliefs: Parents indicated increased confidence in their parenting role and a more positive outlook on life and their abilities. This is consistent with findings from other parenting interventions that demonstrated improvements in parental self-efficacy and psychological well-being (e.g., Barlow et al., 2002, 2006; Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015; Yap et al., 2014).

Parents in the present study reported improved ability to regulate their emotional stress and engage in self-care practices. This aligns with research by Muzik et al. (2015), which found that parenting programmes can enhance parents' capacity for self-care and coping with stress.

Cluver et al. (2017), in a study in South Africa that also followed a pre-test–post-test design, found large effects in increased positive parenting and medium to substantial impacts on reducing child abuse and neglect and improved parental functioning. Consistent with the findings of the current study, these researchers found that the programme did facilitate positive parenting and self-efficacy when psychological well-being was measured in the short term.

While the Family Affairs parenting programme shows promising results with regard to improving parental self-efficacy and psychological well-being, a direct comparison cannot be made without a comparison group and longer-term follow-up evaluations, which would enable a more thorough comparison of its effectiveness relative to other established parenting programmes.

Family organisational and communication patterns: The results of the present study showed that the Family Affairs programme assists parents to develop more effective ways of communicating with their children and organising family life. This is similar to findings of Cluver et al. (2017) in South Africa, who, also using a pre–post outcome evaluation design, found improvements in positive parenting and communication strategies following a parenting intervention.

The consistent pattern of self-reported improvements across multiple domains of parenting and self-efficacy suggests that the Family Affairs parenting programme may be effective in promoting positive changes in parents' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. These findings are encouraging and align with the broader literature on the potential benefits of parenting interventions for enhancing parental self-efficacy and family functioning. Previous research has shown that, when parents learn from parenting programmes when given the opportunity to reflect on their current practices and assisted in adopting new approaches (Barlow et al., 2012). This approach is also followed in the Family Affairs parenting programme, and parents are assisted in developing healthier ways of dealing with their parenting frustrations.

5.2 Improved parent–child relationship

The results of the present study showed that, prior to the programme, participants had, on average, a mediocre relationship with their children, with the results showing significant improvements after parents had completed the programme. They also felt that their relationship

and communication patterns with their children had improved. A key finding was the significant improvement in parent–child relationship scores across all cohorts after the programme ($Z = -11.19$; $p = 0.0001$). For example, the median score increased from 42 before the programme to 55 after the programme. These perceived effects on parents’ relationships with their children were noted during three-month follow up surveys and were thus sustained for at least three months following the programme (Life Choices, 2018, 2019, 2020).

The *Parent–child relationship* scores seem to suggest that, prior to the programme, the participants had poor relationships with their children. They did not engage with their children and did not make time for them, nor did they communicate effectively with them. Parents were also not aware of their children’s needs and did not know how to handle them when they showed aggression. Most parents did not spend much time with their children, for example, preparing a meal together. They also reported a lack of awareness of their parenting styles. The results showed that, after the programme, they had acquired knowledge about their children’s physical and psychological needs.

The view that both good and poor parenting affect children's behaviour is extensively documented and well-supported by research (Assel et al., 2002, Bloomfield & Kendall, 2012; Cooper et al., 1999; Sarwar, 2016; Spinelli et al., 2020). When parents pay attention to and respond to their children according to their temperamental needs, the relationship tends to improve (Iverson & Gartstein, 2018; Sanson & Rothbart, 1995). The parents in all three cohorts in the present study reported that the Family Affairs programme helped them to understand their children’s temperaments, which they found useful in improving their relationships with their children.

In a comparative study, Rose et al. (2018) evaluated a 10-session parenting programme for improving parental efficacy and relationship with children in a South African community, using a pre- and post-test design with 60 participants. The study showed that the parents found the programme useful in improving their understanding of their parenting role and their relationships with their children. In their parenting self-report study, Chislett and Kennett (2007) established whether programme completion was associated with improved parenting performance. Similarly to the present study, the results showed parents who had attended the programme engaged in more positive and warmer parent–child interactions and showed more

confidence and resourcefulness in in with children with differing temperaments, and engaged in better problem-solving practices after the programme, compared to before the programme (Chislett & Kennett, 2007). This finding resonates with the self-reports from Family Affairs parents who stated that their newly adopted parenting skills increased their confidence in their parenting role, and their willingness to be patient in order to better understand their children.

McCleary and Ridley (1999) conducted an outcome evaluation of a parent skills training programme for parents of adolescents with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Using a pre–post outcome evaluation design of parent self-report measures, they found that, after the programme, the parents reported positive beliefs and engaging in new ways of communicating, with a positive effect on the parent–child relationships. As parents improve their parenting competency and understanding of their children, they increase the likelihood of children’s disruptive behaviours while facilitating better emotional adjustment (Au et al., 2014; Bürger & Musek, 2020; Landy & Menna, 2006). The results of the present study also showed that most parents and caregivers reported not understanding their children’s temperaments, as shown by a median that lay between “Disagree” and “Agree” (five-point response scale). After the programme most, of the responses were between “Agree” and “Strongly agree”.

Fetsch et al. (1999), in an evaluation of a RETHINK parenting and anger management programme, found significant improvements in parenting skills and anger management after participating in the programme. Specifically, 81.3% of participants reported listening to and communicating with their children better after the programme, which enhanced their relationships. Similarly, Family Affairs parenting programme found significant improvements in parent–child relationships, with median scores increasing from 33 to 48 before the programme to 52 to 57 after the programme across the three cohorts.

Tobe et al. (2022), using a pre-post study design, found changes in cognition and attitudes amongst Japanese mothers, particularly in how they perceive and manage anger in parenting after a group-based anger management programme. Parents reported significant anger-control improvement post-test, compared to pre-test. Specifically, 92% of participants reported harbouring kind feelings towards their child post-test, while 87% reported hitting their child less often. These findings indicate statistically significant improvements in mothers' anger management, attitudes, behaviours, and mother–child relationships after participating in the

Anger Management Programme for Parents (Tobe et al., 2022). A systematic review of randomised controlled trials by Barlow et al. (2016) of 22 studies that reported on parent–child interaction outcomes, with a total of 1 721 participants, found improvements in parent–child relationships following group-based parenting interventions.

The Family Affairs programme seems to give parents the agency, positive belief, and expectation that they are able to improve their relationships with their children. This positive expectation encouraged the programme participants to engage with their children with understanding, when, in the past, they were likely to dismiss the children’s needs and temperamental differences.

Walsh (2002) highlights family flexibility, connectedness, and social/economic resources as crucial organisational patterns. The results of the present outcome evaluation of the Family Affairs programme indicate improvements in these areas. Parents reported better relationships with their children after the programme, with median scores increasing across all cohorts. There was a significant increase in parents' understanding of their children's needs and how to handle challenging behaviours. These changes suggest enhanced family connectedness and flexibility in parenting approaches, consistent with Walsh's framework (Walsh, 2002).

Walsh's (2002) theory also emphasises clear communication, open emotional expression, and collaborative problem-solving. The present outcome evaluation of the Family Affairs programme showed improvements in these areas. Parents reported improved communication with their children after the programme. Examples of the positive communication in self-reports by parents/caregivers were seen in responses to such questions as: “My children listen to me” and “My children talk to me about their feelings”. These improvements suggest that the Family Affairs programme may have provided participants with effective tools and strategies to enhance their relationships with their children. As parents feel more confident and positive about themselves (evidenced by the increased median scores), they may be better equipped to engage in clear, open communication with their children. The improved self-perception could contribute to more effective problem-solving skills, which Walsh (2002) identifies as crucial to family resilience.

5.3 Positive changes to parenting style

The results on participants' awareness of their parenting style indicated that the median for the 2018 cohort was 10 before the programme, and that it increased to 14 after the programme. For the 2019 and 2020 cohorts, the medians were both 8 before and 15 after the programme. Parents thus reported increased awareness of their parenting approach, suggesting that the programme promotes reflection on current practices and provides facilitation in adopting a parenting style that is more conducive to the well-being of their children. This aligns with research that showed that parenting programmes can lead to parents finding healthier ways to address their parenting frustrations (Barlow et al., 2012).

The results of the current study suggest that, prior to the intervention programme, most parents were unaware of their children's needs or how the proper way to address misbehaviour. They were also unaware of their parenting style. The results after the intervention programme revealed that they had gained knowledge about the needs of their children and were able to recognise whether their parenting style was authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, or uninvolved.

The results of the present study are aligned with those of Joussemet et al. (2014) who evaluated a similar programme, the How-to Parenting Program, to assess its effectiveness in improving parenting style, and found similar results. As found by Joussemet et al. (2013), parents in the present study reported being better able to regulate their parenting approach in dealing with their children once they had attended the programme. In a comparative study, Lindsay and Strand (2013) conducted an evaluation of the effectiveness of national parenting programmes in England using a pre- and post-test design to measure parenting style. The results showed significant improvements on the measure of parenting style and knowledge, especially with regard to the Positive Parenting Programme (Lindsay & Strand, 2013). The parents' self-reports in Lindsay and Strand's (2013) study showed that parents' improved awareness of their parenting style led to restraint in their reactions to their children's conduct, and parents reported that their children's behaviour improved, and that they willingly did chores around the home.

The results of the present study are also aligned with those of Porzig-Drummond et al. (2015), who conducted an evaluation of a group training parenting intervention using a pre- and post-study design. Parents self-reported an increase in an authoritative parenting style immediately

after programme completion (Porzig-Drummond et al., 2015).

Overall, this result of the present study indicates that, as parents gain knowledge and understanding of their parenting style, it improves their awareness of how they parent their children, leading to more authoritative parenting, with a positive impact on children's behaviour. Thus, the result suggests that the Family Affairs parenting programme does contribute to improvements in parents' knowledge of their children's stages of development, their needs, and an appropriate parenting style. These perceived effects were noted in three-month follow up surveys (Life Choices, 2018, 2019, 2020), indicating that these effects may be sustainable in the long term.

This concludes the discussion of the results related to the study's research questions. The next section provides a brief overview of dimensions of the Family Affairs parenting programme that fell outside the scope of the study but may have impacted the results, as the effects of improvements on the dimensions are intertwined and change in one area may support change in another.

5.4 Other dimensions of the Family Affairs programme that may impact outcomes

Three aspects of the Family Affairs parenting programme, which fell outside the scope of the study, may have influenced the results of the dimensions evaluated in the current study, specifically the age of participants, their level of participation, and their use of counselling services and support structures.

Age: With regards to age, many of the parents in the present study were adolescents when they became parents (Life Choices, 2018). Research has shown that parental competence is associated with age, with older parents being more likely to have better parenting skills and better relationships with their children (Duncan et al., 2018; Kessler et al., 2005; Ragozin et al., 1982). Studies have also found that younger parents experiencing more depression, emotional immaturity, and stress than older parents (Boden et al., 2008; Kessler et al., 2005; Mirowsky & Ross, 2002; Ragozin et al., 1982).

Research has also shown a positive correlation between maternal age and parent beliefs, family organisational and communication patterns, and the parent-child relationship (Augustine et al.,

2015; Boden et al., 2008; Duncan et al., 2018; Leigh & Gong, 2010). Ragozin et al. (1982), in a self-report study of the effects of age on parenting found a correlation between older parents and greater parent satisfaction, positive beliefs, and the time committed to parenting. Studies have also found that older mothers are better able than younger mothers to adjust to and deal with parenting challenges (Duncan et al., 2018; Ragozin et al., 1982).

Attendance: The present study applied the inclusion criterion of programme participants who had attended at least four of the seven sessions. Benefits of the programme may be more pronounced in cases where parents had attended more sessions. Lucia and Dumas (2013), in an evaluation of a parenting programme in Switzerland, found that additional sessions indeed contributed to increasing enhancement of positive parenting practices.

Counselling and support groups: Participants in the Family Affairs parenting programme are offered psychological counselling and participation in support groups. The results of the current study may have been influenced by some participants having received such added support. Comer and Fraser's (1998) evaluation of family support programmes found that support components do add significant value in developing parents' parenting skills, including in dealing with challenging child behaviours.

Interventions in parenting behaviour, mental health, and family functioning for parents of children and adolescents at risk may all be improved by psychotherapy (Ghate & Ramella, 2002; Shenderovich et al., 2019). In addition, studies on group-based parenting interventions have shown that counselling may reduce parents' emotional anguish and increase their self-efficacy in the short term (Nunes et al., 2022). Thus, parents in the present study who had attended counselling sessions and participated in support group activities may have reaped greater benefits from the Family Affairs programme, especially when considering their disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances. However, more research is required to differentiate the extent of the perceived effects on the quality of parenting.

This concludes the discussion of the results of the present study. The next section offers recommendations for the managers of the Family Affairs programme and policymakers.

5.5 Recommendations

In this section, recommendations are made based on the results of the study. However, the recommendations should be weighed against the limitations of the study and any changes that may have occurred since the period under study.

5.5.1 Recommendations for the Family Affairs Parenting Programme

The following recommendations may assist the programme managers in enhancing certain aspects of the programme.

While the present study has shown the Family Affairs programme theory to be plausible, incorporating ongoing support and follow-up sessions may assist in reinforcing and sustaining improvements in the long run, and may even yield additional development (see Cluver et al., 2018). This could include mentoring by peers with more experience in parenting than young parents. A study by Day et al. (2012) found that peer-led parenting interventions can be effective in improving parenting skills and child behaviour outcomes, while Mejia et al. (2015) demonstrated that programmes with peer components build solidarity and can be valuable in low-resource contexts.

Improving the evaluation design of the Family Affairs parenting programme and including follow-up evaluations over time will assist in demonstrating more rigorously its value to the communities it serves.

Programme managers could also consider adding a home visitation component to bolster positive parenting and provide additional support to parents in their own environment, which strategy is supported by literature (Sanders, 1999; Sanders et al., 2014; Shenderovich et al., 2019, 2020; Stormshak et al., 2002). Home visitations may also offer an opportunity to encourage greater programme participation, which may, in turn, enhance programme outcomes.

The number of sessions could also be increased from the current seven, to allow programme facilitators more time to address additional issues that may emerge. Nowak and Heinrichs (2008) found that more intensive parenting interventions, i.e., those with more sessions, tend to have larger effects on parenting outcomes.

5.5.2 *Recommendations for policymakers*

Policymakers should allocate increased funding and resources to expand the reach of parenting support programmes like the Family Affairs parenting programme, especially in communities with a low socio-economic status and high incidences of at-risk children due to contextual factors.

Increased collaboration is required between government, civil organisations, and programmes such as Family Affairs to create partnerships in knowledge-sharing to address parenting challenges through support for holistic programme design and evaluation.

Policymakers should also consider policies that support the integration of parenting programmes such as Family Affairs with other community social services, to enhance the success of the programme in providing mental health support and job-search assistance.

The next section provides recommendations for future research in this domain.

5.6 *Recommendations for future research*

More research is needed to fully understand the long-term impacts and sustainability of the outcomes of the Family Affairs parenting programme in the dynamic socio-economic environments of the Cape Flats communities. Such studies could take a longitudinal approach, which will enable comparisons over time, which would provide additional evidence for best practices. Future studies could also examine differential effects of the programme on mothers versus fathers, and younger versus older parents.

Research could also differentiate the impact of specific contextual factors on parenting and the success of parenting programmes, and the impact of counselling and support groups on programme outcomes should also receive research attention. Such studies may yield additional and more nuanced data if methods such as observation and qualitative narratives of parents and children are included.

The limitations of the present study also highlight the need to identify and evaluate the effectiveness of various types of parenting programmes in South Africa over longer periods using more rigorous evaluation methodologies and include comparison groups.

5.7 Conclusion

This study evaluated the effectiveness of the Family Affairs parenting programme across three cohorts of parents and caregivers who participated in the programme in 2018, 2019, or 2020. The research focused on three key outcomes, namely parental self-development, parent–child relationships, and parenting style. The results consistently showed significant improvements in all measured areas following participation in the programme.

The main findings with regard to *Parental self-development* were significant increases in participants' scores across all cohorts ($Z = -11.01$; $p = 0.0001$) after programme attendance. The overall median score rose from 77 to 105, indicating a shift towards more positive self-perceptions due to enhanced psychological well-being and self-efficacy amongst participants.

The main findings with regard to *Parent–child relationships* were significant improvements in participants' scores across all cohorts ($Z = -11.19$; $p = 0.0001$) after programme attendance. Median scores increased from the range of 33–48 before the programme to 52–57 after the programme. Parents reported better communication, more quality time spent with their children, and an improved understanding of their children's needs.

The main findings with regard to *Parenting style* were significant improvements across the 2018 cohort ($Z = -7.03$; $p = 0.0001$) and the 2019 and 2020 cohorts ($Z = -19.92$; $p = 0.0001$) after attending the programme. For the 2019 and 2020 cohorts, the median score nearly doubled, from 8 to 15, indicating substantially enhanced awareness and application of effective parenting techniques.

The results further showed that the Family Affairs parenting programme significantly improves parents' belief systems, family organisational patterns, communication, and problem-solving skills (H2). The Family Affairs programme improves how parents and caregivers feel about themselves and improves their relationships with the children in their care (H3). The Family Affairs parenting programme is also successful in increasing parents' awareness and knowledge of their parenting style (H4). However, not all the results for the 2020 cohort were significant, which may be attributable to the stress associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, which was exacerbated by fear of job loss.

Overall, this outcome evaluation has shown that the Family Affairs programme is based in

sound theory and is making valuable strides in attaining its goal of enabling parents to deliver competent, quality parenting despite the adverse circumstances of the Cape Flats in Cape Town, South Africa.

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